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# MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND THE BEGINNINGS OF FEMALE EMANCIPATION IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND

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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT TER VERKRIJGING VAN DEN GRAAD VAN DOCTOR IN DE LETTEREN EN WIJSBEGEERTE AAN DE UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM OP GEZAG VAN DEN RECTOR-MAGNIFICUS DR P. ZEEMAN, HOOGLEERAAR IN DE FACULTEIT DER WIS- EN NATUURKUNDE, IN HET OPENBAAR TE VERDEDIGEN IN DE AULA DER UNIVERSITEIT OP VRIJDAG 17 NOV. 1922 DES NAMIDDAGS TE 4 UUR

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JACOB BOUTEN,
GEBOREN TE DORDRECHT

H. J. PARIS
V/H FIRMA A. H. KRUYT
AMSTERDAM

TO

MY WIFE

# PREFACE.

There is something particularly fascinating about the study of the literature and philosophy of the eighteenth century, with its gradual evolution of lofty social ideals which the Revolution failed to realise. When the altered circumstances brought promotion within my reach, it completely brought me under its sway, and ultimately came to determine my choice of a subject for an inaugural dissertation. It was while engaged upon tracing the influence of Rousseau's hopebringing theories on his English disciple William Godwin, that the less boldly assertive, but all the more humanly attractive personality of the latter's first wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, attracted my attention. My admiration of her husband's intellect paled before my sympathy for her more modest, but at the same time more emotional character. Where the indebtedness of Godwin to Rousseau and the Encyclopedians has been manifested so clearly in different works, the absence of any direct attempt to prove and determine the extent of the relations between Mary Wollstonecraft and the early French philosophers struck me as an omission for which I found it difficult to account, and made me turn to a subject to which I am fully aware that a book of the size of the present little volume does but scant justice.

I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to thankfully acknowledge the valuable help and friendly encouragement received from *Professor Dr. A. E. H. Swaen*, of the University of Amsterdam, whose unceasing kindness and ever-ready interest in the preparation of this treatise I shall never forget.

*Mr. K. R. Gallas*, Lecturer on French Literature in the same University, has likewise a claim to my heartfelt gratitude for giving me the benefit of his extensive knowledge in making various suggestions with regard to the chapters dealing with the literature of France.

My best thanks are also due to *Mr. M. G. van Neck* and *Dr. P. Fijn van Draat* for guiding my reading for the B.-examination, and particularly to my first teacher of English, *Mr. L. P. H. Eijkman*, for giving me that interest in England and her language and literature which has determined my subsequent career.

*Amsterdam*, November 1922.

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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

*The Main Theories regarding the Position of Women.*

The history of the Emancipation of Women is the long and varied record of their slow and gradual liberation from that utter subjection to Man in which various circumstances beyond their control — among which the physical superiority of the latter, a form of male supremacy which has seldom been called into question, was probably the most prominent — had combined to place them. It relates how in the course of centuries — either with the support of a certain portion of the opposite sex or relying upon their own resources — they strove to cast off the shackles which bound and degraded them, and to acquire that degree of physical, intellectual and moral freedom to which they felt themselves entitled. That the movement towards complete enfranchisement met with a varied reception and was hampered and retarded by men and often by women themselves was due chiefly to the fact that in the question of female possibilities there was much diversity of opinions at different times and among different nations. The worst enemies to evolution of this kind were those women who, holding the Empire of Love and Gallantry to be their exclusive domain, in which their sway was not likely to be ever disputed, turned deliberately against those of their own sex who in trying to wrench from the hands of men the sceptre of social power, were willing to forego the privileges of sex. That women were thus divided among themselves from the first, was the natural outcome of those differences in personal attractions and in personal intelligence which have always constituted the great danger of too sweeping conclusions with regard to the inclinations and capabilities of the female sex. Individual members of the same sex may yet be radically different, and he who would prescribe for all will always find himself confronted by the bewildering problem of the disparity of individuals.

The champions of the Cause of Woman have had to overcome a great deal of stubborn opposition, nor can it be said that even at the present moment the emancipation of women is complete. Even now

that the ideal of perfect equality in everything seems almost within reach, and the domestic woman has largely given way to the social worker and the political agitator, it may be a matter of speculation whether the full realisation of the long wished-for end, throwing open to women all those occupations from which centuries of injustice rigorously excluded them, would mean a blessing to society and to women in particular, or a mixture of gain and loss. Those who regard women from the all-human standpoint, holding the functions of sex to be only a passing incident in the great scheme of life, will be inclined to take the former view; those, on the other hand, who believe that a woman's life derives its colour from considerations of sex which refuse to be ignored, may well wonder where a rigorous application of perfect equality will land us in the end. In one respect however, there has been great and undeniable progress. The modern tendency to overlook sexual differences ensures to individual women the necessary freedom to judge for themselves whether a life of domestic or one of social duties will be more compatible with their personal inclinations; and no woman whose hopes of domestic bliss are rudely blunted, need — as was the case in former times — despair of succeeding in life; any talents she may happen to possess, will find full scope. If we contrast with this the truly pitiable condition of unmarried women in earlier ages, who were too often treated contemptuously for failing to perform what was considered the only duty of womanhood — the propagation of the species — we cannot but feel grateful to the champions of emancipation, whose restless ardour and unceasing devotion has entailed such glorious results.

The feminist programme includes a number of points, on some of which something will have to be said. There is, in the first place, that physical enfranchisement which makes the woman cease to be the witless, and therefore irresponsible and soulless, slave to the caprices of a brutal master. There is, in the second place, the intellectual emancipation of women, admitting the female sex to the participation of Reason and granting them that education of the mind which is to place them on a par with the other half of humanity; and there is that moral emancipation which recognises woman as a being endowed with a soul, equal to that of man, with consequent moral duties and responsibilities, partly dictated by considerations of sex. As a direct consequence of these, there is finally, social emancipation, constituting principles of perfect equality between the sexes, also in matters of social and political interest. They are all of them largely

dependent on the growth of civilisation. It has even been said that the degree of civilisation in a nation is determined by the position of its women in the life of the community.

In the early stages of history — in that savage state which some authors persist in preferring to the social state of an imperfect civilisation — only the physical condition of women was considered, and, where even some of the most fervent advocates of the female excellence are forced to acknowledge the physical inferiority of the sex, it is but natural that the women of prehistoric times were kept in utter subjection, being regarded exclusively as a means of gratifying the animal instincts. But with the growth of civilisation came the development of the mind, and it has always been one of the bitterest grievances of feminists against man, that he, taking advantage of his usurped authority, deliberately withheld from woman the means of proving that the supposed inferiority only concerned her physical capacities, and not those of the mind. Even as late as the 18th century the complaint is repeatedly uttered (and this is one of the points where two women of such widely different views as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More fully agree) that men keep from women all opportunities of that cultivation of the understanding which infallibly leads to virtue, and by a singular want of logic hold them responsible for the moral deficiency which is the inevitable consequence. In the introduction to her "*Strictures on the modern system of female education*" Hannah More calls it "a singular injustice which is often exercised towards women, first to give them a very defective education and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct; to train them in such a manner as shall lay them open to the most dangerous faults and then to censure them for not proving faultless" [1]), and the argument seems indeed unanswerable. Hence the cry for female education which Plato was among the first to raise. The physical inequality between the sexes was apparent and therefore remained, upon the whole, uncontested, but the problem of the possibilities of the female understanding was less easy to solve and admitted of different opinions; hence it was in the first stage of the growth of the human mind that the great question was first broached the solution of which was to occupy so many minds in so many successive centuries.

While making every possible allowance for deviations due to indi-

1) Edition T. Cadell, Strand, 1830; p. IX.

vidual opinion, which mostly had its roots either in a particular form of creed or in some special system of philosophy, it may be stated that there were throughout the centuries two directly opposing lines of thought, each leading to certain clearly marked conclusions.

Of these, the first and oldest is based upon considerations of practice rather than theory, which makes it less rigid and more adaptable to the exigencies of practical life. It was adopted on the whole by churchmen and religious moralists rather than by abstract philosophers, and had the full support of the unquestioned doctrines of Christianity, of which support its adherents never failed to make the best use. It determined the attitude of the early Christian Church towards women in taking for granted the existence of a sexual character, from which it draws inferences. The difference between the sexes is essential and not restricted to physical differentiations. They were intended for different functions and have widely different duties to fulfil. Man's chief duty is the support of the family he has reared — for which obviously his strength of muscle was intended, — his is the struggle for life against a hostile society in which egoism reigns supreme and the interests of individuals constantly clash. Woman's special province is the home ; hers is the difficult and important task of regulating the domestic life and bringing up the children she has borne. So far this theory receives support from observations of the animal world. But that faculty which marks the essential difference between the human and the animal kingdom became the apple of discord among many later generations. For Reason was held to be the prerogative of Man only, in which Woman had no share. His world is the world of the Intellect, the world of Action, in which sex is only an episode ; hers is the world of Sentiment and of Contemplation, in which sex is the dominant factor. To think is the prerogative of Man, to feel that of Woman. That there is also an intellectual side to the quiet undisturbed contemplation of confinement at home was demonstrated by Shakespeare when creating the character of Lady Macbeth, nor was the monopoly of Thought greatly abused by the mediaeval Lords of creation, the only scholars of that period being those who had resigned their sex. But apart from those who lived in convents and whose reading was exclusively religious, women were self-taught or rather taught by experience, and the use of books was confined to some monasteries.

Starting from the above principle, any claim to intellectual equality would have seemed an encroachment upon the male kingdom. Love

and maternity, and the daily routine of the household ought to be the only considerations in a woman's existence and whatever is outside these is the domain of Man. To Woman was allotted the task of managing the home, to Man the more comprehensive one of managing society. That in reality the former is quite as important as the latter, which must always largely depend on it, since Woman is the mother of Man, and the guide of his first steps, did not find full recognition until the 17th century, when Fénelon and some of his contemporaries made this consideration a basis on which to build their demands for a female education.

Early Christianity, drawing the necessary conclusions from certain Biblical allusions to the position of Woman and guided by St. Paul's teachings, adopted the Hebraic notions of female inferiority and dependence, which long met with no resistance whatever. The early churchmen, in strict obedience to the teaching of their faith, tacitly accepted the inferiority of women and their subjection to men. About these little need be said here. They were partly responsible for the misery of women in the early Middle Ages, the time of their greatest debasement and degradation, and will be remembered only among the adversaries of feminism. However, the fact must here be emphasized, that even the full acceptance of a sexual character does not necessitate, and in practice did not always lead to, insistence upon the female inferiority.

There are those who, while assigning to woman a place in society differing essentially from that held by man, do not infer that woman is necessarily inferior to man. They purposely refrain from comparing that which by its very nature defies comparison : "for Woman is not undeveloped Man, but diverse." They insist instead on the division of functions which makes the sexes supplement each other. The majority are moralists, churchmen of a later age, and to them the problem is that of sexual duties, with the promise of eternity in the background, which is intended for both sexes, female as well as male. The pursuit of Christian virtue, which to them is the essential thing, is regardless of sex and leads to self-abnegation which renders the sexual problem of secondary importance. The very orthodoxy of her faith prevented Hannah More from becoming a feminist in the full sense of the word, and as Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism came to absorb her mind more fully, her religious convictions retired into the background. To the Christian moralist the place of woman in the social structure must of necessity

be an important one ; but it is made so only by the *domestic* duties which devolve upon her. She is expected to bring up her children to be good Christians, good citizens, and good fathers and mothers, in the moral interest of society, and this duty obviously involves the necessity for women to receive the benefit of a moral education. In this lies the gist of the moralist 's arguments in favour of a partial female emancipation. To be a good educator of the young it is indispensable that the mother herself should be liberally instructed, for what is to become of her influence, should her male offspring come to regard her as intellectually inferior ? In this argument the feminist and the moralist join hands. Fénelon and his contemporaries were philosophers and for the rigid, inflexible interpretation of Scripture by the early churchmen they substituted the structure of moral philosophy, which thus indirectly promoted the growth of feminist ideas. In their eyes an education is the very first requisite to enable a woman to discharge the duties imposed by motherhood.

The second line of thought, in direct opposition to the assumption of a sexual character, takes for its starting-point the theory of *equality* in everything except what is physical, arriving at the conclusion that there is nothing which woman — if given the benefit of the same education — is not capable of performing equally well as man. In view of the impossibility of furnishing conclusive rational evidence — women are not educated and therefore no opportunity is given them to vindicate their powers — the adherents of this theory, who mostly belong to the rational school of philosophy, point to the example of some individual women, who in spite of a defective education obtained great results, thereby laying themselves open to the criticism that what may apply to certain individuals, need not hold good for the entire sex, which argument they try to refute by insisting on the experiment being made. This ultra-feminist way of thinking equally originated in France, where Mlle de Gournay and François Poullain de la Barre built up their theories more than a century before Mary Wollstonecraft voiced their claims in the English language.

Apart from certain physical differences which even she could not deny, although she held with truth that they were often exaggerated, nay, purposely augmented, woman possesses the same capabilities as man and the existing difference in intellectual development may be entirely removed by means of an education which does not regard sex. This process of reasoning naturally leads to a denial of sexual character. The mental inferiority of women is merely the consequence

of ages of neglect which urgently demands reparation. The soul, they agreed with the moralists, has no sex — an assertion which some of the early Christian leaders might have felt inclined to call into question — and since the development of the moral sense depends largely upon the condition of the mind, it is the *right* of women to be educated. The claim for education as a natural right was first made in its full purport by Mary Wollstonecraft, to whom belongs the undivided honour of having been the first woman in Europe to apply Rousseau's famous theory of the Rights of Man to her own sex by taking her stand upon the principle of equality of the sexes.

The extreme adherents of equality among the philosophers of the French Revolution founded their claims upon an absolute denial of all innate character, holding the character of every individual to be the resultant of different influences to which it has been exposed. Among French philosophers Helvétius had been the first to profess this theory in his "*Traité de l'Homme*." Diderot had written an energetic reply, vindicating the theory of innateness and heredity, and the topic had remained a theme of frequent dispute. The partisans of Helvétius, among whom were both Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, continuing his line of argument, were naturally led to the most optimistic forecasts for a happy future. It only remained to find a way to perfect education and to extend it from a few privileged ones to the multitude, and all evil would of necessity disappear, and society would be rebuilt upon a more solid foundation. The consequence was an overwhelming number of educational treatises, mainly in the French language, most of which, however, sadly overlooked the pressing needs of woman.

It was again Mary Wollstonecraft who extended this implicit faith in the perfectibility of humanity to the case of woman. All that women needed was to be given a good education, and the rest would follow. So convinced were these idealists of the incontestability of their arguments that they refused to make any concessions, however slight, to those who held different views. This very inflexibility became the means of ruining their best intentions. They did not stop at intellectual and moral enfranchisement, their daring schemes comprised complete social and political emancipation. In the period with which we shall be chiefly concerned, their efforts were doomed to failure by the circumstance that their aims were physically incapable of realisation while society remained in the state in which it found itself at the time of the outbreak of the French Revolution. Those

more or less unconscious feminists, the Bluestockings, were responsible for far more direct improvement through the very moderation of their suggestions than Mary Wollstonecraft, whose lonely voice in the wilderness of British conventionality heralded the great and successful movement of a later century. When the inevitable reaction set in, the entire feminist movement, which Mary had identified with the cause of liberty, as advocated by the French, was regarded as anti-national and seditious, and first ridiculed and reviled, to be soon after consigned to a temporary oblivion.

When called upon to decide which of the two lines of argument referred to above deserves most sympathy, the unbiased onlooker may find himself sadly perplexed. In choosing between the advocates of dignified domesticity and those of perfect equality, one might be inclined to decide in favour of the former; yet the fact remains that, if especially the last decades have brought considerable progress, it is chiefly the latter we have to thank for it. For the pathway of the pioneer is rough and beset with difficulties, and she may seem "no painful inch to gain", and yet the amount of progress, when measured after the lapse of ages may be found to be considerable. But the fatal tendencies to generalise and to exaggerate are everywhere, and invariably spoil the best arguments. To the advocates of equality *à outrance* might be held up the warning example of the "masculine woman", who has succeeded in getting herself abominated both by man and by the wise members of her own sex; who has voluntarily, for the prospect of mostly imaginary gains, unsexed herself, forgetful alike of her task of propagation and education and of the fact that even outside the home-circle there are the sick to be ministered to, and the suffering to be comforted, occupations that demand the loving gentleness and unselfish devotion of which the womanly woman is made more capable by Nature than her brother Man. She scornfully resigns the chivalrous worship of the opposite sex, mixing in political and other debates with a want of moderation and often with a narrowness of views which prove all too clearly that the average woman's qualities fit her for the domestic rather than the social task.

On the other hand, those moralists who exhort women to be content to take their place in society as "wives and mothers", not inferior to man, but different, forget to provide for those women, whom circumstances beyond their control have destined for celibacy, debarring them from the privileges of their own sex, while not

allowing them to share those of the male. For such women it was indeed a blessed day when the word that was to deliver them from bondage and to open to them paths of public usefulness was first spoken by the pioneers of feminism, throwing open to the female sex the many professions for which they are as fit, or even fitter — in spite of the equality theory — than men!

Whatever may be the absolute truth, — which probably no moralist or feminist has ever held, although some may have held a considerable portion of it, — both may be credited with a firm and unshakable belief in the creative force of a good education for women, of whatever description their chief duties in life may be. And, after all, the question of perfect equality and of rivalry between the sexes leading to a struggle for pre-eminence will chiefly attract women who, being more gifted than their sisters, and filled with a laudable desire to devote their talents to their cause, make the error of identifying their own individual plight with that of their sex, imagining women in general to be thwarted in their aims and ambitions, and ascribing to them aspirations which the majority of women never cherished and probably never will cherish. They turn their weapons against "man, the usurper", goading him to opposition and forgetting Hannah More's wise remark that "cooperation, and not competition is indeed the clear principle we wish to see reciprocally adopted by those higher minds in each sex which really approximate the nearest to each other"[1]). This remark, however much it may hold good for the times in which we live, would have elicited from Mary Wollstonecraft the reply that between master and slave there can be no cooperation until the latter's individuality has been fully recognised by emancipation. If, moreover, we consider how she was always thinking of duties before considering the question of female rights, claiming the latter only that with their help women might be better enabled to perform the former, it is difficult to withhold from either woman that sympathy to which the purity of her motives and the extreme earnestness of her endeavour justly entitles her.

The history of female emancipation, therefore, is so closely bound up with that of female education that it often becomes impossible to separate them. Education, to follow the feminist line of rational thought, forms the mind; and a well-formed mind shows a natural inclination towards that perfect virtue which ought to be the ruling

1) *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, p. 226.

power in the universe and the attainment of which is the sole aim of humanity. The feminist problem will not be fully settled until all men and women are equal partakers of the best education which it is in our power to bestow.

It is impossible to record the earliest beginnings of feminism in England without first glancing at that country whence came the powerful wave of philosophical thought which, stimulated by the fathers of British philosophy, in its turn stung the latent feminist energy of a Mary Wollstonecraft to life and was also — although in a less degree — indirectly responsible for the more qualified feminism in the tendencies of the Bluestocking circles and their literature, which it will be our business to describe. After one or two abortive attempts of a directly feminist nature a movement of indirect feminism, which was fostered and nursed by the French *salons* of the 17th century began at a time when in England the condition of women was rapidly sinking to the lowest ebb since the dark ages of mediaevalism. All through the 17th and the greater portion of the 18th century female influence and importance grew and intensified without calling forth anything like a parallel movement in the great rival nation beyond the Channel. Those who, like Mary Astell and Daniel Defoe, caught the spirit of emancipation were indeed pioneers, and to them all English women owe a never-to-be-forgotten debt.

From the beginning of the religious revival in England in the early part of the 18th century to the outbreak of the French Revolution a strong and determined reaction against French manners was noticeable in England. This reaction found its root in national prejudices, which held whatever came from France to be tainted with the utter corruption and depravity of French society and as a natural consequence disqualified public opinion from appreciating the glorious edifice of philosophical thought which was being erected at the same time. It derived greater emphasis from the vicious excesses of the French aristocracy and afterwards from the unparalleled horrors of the Revolution. The English nation has never been remarkable for any special love of imitation, and the menace of French revolutionism turned Great Britain into the very bulwark of the most rigid conservatism. So general did the feeling of hatred of the French revolutionary spirit become, that even Mary Wollstonecraft's determined attempt remained unsupported and was predoomed to failure merely because it was identified with the hated principles of the French Revolution.

## CHAPTER II.

*The Beginnings of a Feminist Movement in France.*

The two main feminist tendencies of the preceding chapter may be found illustrated among the Ancients by the respective theories of Plato and Plutarch regarding women.

The history of ancient Greece records the earliest traces of what might be termed a feminist movement. There was a period when the position of the women of Greece, who had long been kept in submission, excluded from political influence and treated contemptuously in literature, began to awaken some interest. The views of Plato were of an advancedly feminist tendency. His *Republic*, of which the fifth Book deals with the position of women in the ideal state, ascribed their inferior power of reasoning to an education which was based upon the assumption of a sexual character. Plato was the first to assert the moral and intellectual equality of women and to claim for them an equal share in the public duties. His writings foreshadow the constant alternative of later centuries. The woman who is regarded as essentially a citizen will find the consequent responsibilities crowding upon her, which she will be expected to share with her male partners, a bar to the exclusively feminine duties of motherhood and the education of her own progeny. No theories and social movements of the past or of any future time have altered or will alter the axiom that every individual woman will sooner or later find herself at a parting of roads, one of which will lead her to devote her energies to the progress of human society at large, the other to the more exclusive happiness and welfare of the domestic circle. So completely does Plato disregard the feminine instinct, that the children in his commonwealth were to be entrusted to professional nurses, and that the mothers were to be allowed only to suckle the infants promiscuously and without even recognising them, out of bare necessity. The maternal instinct in Plato's state was ignored, and the existence of a sexual character emphatically denied.

Another feminist among the Ancients, although his views differed widely from Plato's, was Plutarch, whose ideas represent the opposite extreme of the ideal set up for women. Woman's chief duty he held to be, not to the state, but to her own family. She should try to be her husband's associate not merely in material things, but also

in the fulfilment of more delicate tasks, prominent among which is that of educating the young, for which purpose she herself requires to be instructed. In direct opposition to Plato, Plutarch insists on the essentially feminine qualities of tenderness, gentleness, grace and sensibility. In preference to a national education, he wishes for a home-education, based upon the natural affections between parent and child.

The theories of Plato and Plutarch contain the germ of one of the main points of dispute among later feminists and anti-feminists: that of a sexual character. On the attitude taken by later writers on the Woman Question towards this all-important problem depends the course into which they are directed. Those who, like Plato, either deny or ignore the existence of a specially feminine character and specially feminine proclivities, are naturally driven to assert the equality of the sexes, and to claim for the female sex an equal share in both the rights and the responsibilities of social life. On the other hand, those who, like Plutarch, lay stress on the domestic and educational duties of womanhood, counterbalancing the public duties of man, duties which take their origin in the innate propensities of the female character, may yet become defenders of the cause of woman, but their demands will be more qualified, and while including in their programme a liberal female education to make women fitting companions to their husbands and wise mothers to their children, will regard the political emancipation of the sex as a hindrance to the discharge of more important duties, and therefore as undesirable.

Although the problem regarding the social status of women was a matter of some speculation and discussion in the early days of antiquity, no female writers arose to take part in them, and the position of the female sex was exclusively determined by male opinion. This circumstance in itself proves conclusively that the prevailing opinion was that woman in her then state was an inferior creature. Women were not even appealed to to make known their own wishes on a subject so vitally concerning them. Their participation in the movement belongs to later times. Upon the whole, the educationalists of Rome took little notice of the problem of female education and instruction. Quintilian, the chief among them, completely ignores the point, and Roman literature affords no contribution of any real importance.

The first statements of the cause thus remained without any direct results. Such traces as had been left were completely swept up in

the years of turmoil that followed, causing early civilisation to fall back into barbarism. The centuries that elapsed between the fall of the Latin Empire and the Renaissance may be called the Dark Age of feminism. Mr. Mc. Cabe in his "*Woman in Political Evolution*" states that the decline of the comparative esteem in which women were held among the Romans set in even before the great Empire began to totter on its foundations, and was largely due to the Judaic spirit which prevailed in the early days of Christianity, demanding the implicit obedience of women to the stronger sex, a point of view which was found endorsed in many places in both the old and the New Testament. The earliest Christian leaders had been taught to regard woman as the agent of man's downfall, and readily observed the law that rendered her dependent. They were for the most part zealots, who did not believe in any literature that was not devotional. Even the most enlightened among them, St. Jerome, who had to answer the charge of occupying himself preferably with the instruction of women — which accusation he met with the complaint that the men were displaying an absolute indifference to instruction of any kind — wanted to make narrow religious asceticism the basis of his education of women. Being exempt from social and political duties, they seemed naturally fitted for a life of devotion and contempt of the world, directing their energies and hopes towards a life to come. In the strict retirement of the cloisters they filled their time with prayer and sacred literature. Thus, in the dark age, the ideal of womanhood became the Virgin, who lived her life of devotion far from the temptations of a wicked world with which she had nothing in common. Those women — and they were the majority — who did not pursue so lofty an ideal, sank lower and lower, and came to be regarded as mere sexual instruments, without any claim to consideration, by men whose only interest was war, and among whom learning was regarded with contempt.

Before the great Renaissance came with its revival of learning in which some women had a share, bringing improvement to some privileged ones, but leaving the bulk of them in the pool of ignorance and slavery into which they had sunk, two minor renaissances call for mention. The first, of the late eighth and early ninth century, centres round the names of Charlemagne, Emperor of the Franks, and Alcuin. They saw, indeed, the necessity for better instruction and founded a great many schools, but in their scheme women as a class were unfortunately overlooked. The second revival, that of Abélard,

which took place in the twelfth century, marks the beginning of a more rational education, subjecting various theological problems to the test of reason and logic. Unfortunately, this second revival soon degenerated, and gave rise to a class of pedants who neither understood the aims, nor even the principles of education and against whose severity and arrogance the great reformers of the Renaissance as Rabelais, Montaigne and Roger Ascham directed their shafts. Neither of these revivals, therefore, exercised any considerable influence on the position of women.

It was also in the twelfth century that the influence of the conquest of England by the Normans began to make itself felt in Latin Europe. The early traditions of England regarding women offer a striking contrast to those which lived on the continent. When in the days of Julius Caesar the Romans first set foot on British soil, they found a well-balanced society, in which prevailed a state of comparative equality between the sexes, and a correspondingly high code of morality. The British women were consulted whenever an important resolution had to be taken, and Tacitus, and in later days Selden, were lavish in their praise of the dignity and bravery of Boadicea, whose history has furnished even modern authors with a fitting subject.

About the middle of the fifth century there began those invasions of Anglo-Saxons which led to a partial blending of the two races. The newcomers also reverenced their women; history even records the names of some "Queens regnant" among them, and ladies of birth and quality sat in their Witenagemot. The church boasted among its abbesses some fine specimens of intellectual womanhood (St. Hilda, St. Modivenna), and in general the position of women among the Anglo-Saxons points to a spirit of generous chivalry.

William the Conqueror and his men, who overran and subjected the country in the eleventh century, came from a land where the principles of the Salic law were recognised. Seen from a feminist point of view, this invasion was a most fatal occurrence. Under Norman influence a rapid decline set in.

But if the Normans Latinised the manners and customs of the nations subjected to their rule, the latter influenced their conquerors in a more subtle way through their literature. It was especially the literature of Celtic England that hit the taste of mediaeval France. The Arthurian Cycle found its way to the Continent. It breathes a spirit of chivalry, and depicts a blending of the sexes on terms of

homage to the fair and weaker which came like a revelation. And although the chivalrous element soon degenerated — Mr. Mc. Cabe deliberately leaves early romanticism out of account, calling it "a cult of pretty faces and rounded limbs, leading to a general laxity in morals" — yet it opened the eyes of the stronger sex to the possibility of women playing some slight part in society. In this connection it is rather amusing — and also enlightening as illustrating the general estimate of women — to read about a proposal made by one Pierre du Bois to king Edward the First to make Christian women marry Saracen husbands, that they might have a chance of converting them. The first social mission of women, if du Bois had been given his way, would thus have been that of utilising their charms to make religious converts. At the same time, he deemed it advisable to fit them for this task by giving them a rather liberal education and instruction.

There was, however, one important result of the new tendencies. The education of girls in the early Middle Ages, — such as it was — was a monastic one, practised within the walls of a convent. But in feudal society it became more and more customary to have the daughters of aristocratic families brought up at home, either by a tutor, or by some member of the family whose parts fitted him for the task. This first secularisation of female education among the higher classes was mainly responsible for the awakening interest of some women in literature of a secular kind. The traditions of the Church had demanded the teaching of Latin long after it had fallen into disuse in the outside world. The secular education, which comprised little actual instruction, next to music and dancing, came to include a good deal of physical exercise. Religion was not neglected, but relegated to a less commanding position, and secular literature in the vernacular became a favourite pastime, so much so, that (about 1400) Gerson thought it necessary to protest against the reading of the *Roman de la Rose* by young ladies, from motives of delicacy.

In spite of many backslidings, the position of women was now very slowly beginning to improve, and in the argument between the partisans and the opponents of female instruction the latter were beginning to have the worst of it. In the fifteenth century one or two forerunners of the renaissance-women swelled the ranks of the advocates of the cause.

There was in France Christine de Pisan, who in her "*Cit des Dames*" protested against the conventional statement, that the spreading

of learning among women had had a disastrous influence upon their morals. In illustration of her plea she quoted the example of Jehan Audry, "solennel canoniste à Boulogne", who, when prevented by circumstances from giving his lessons of divine wisdom, sent his daughter Novelle in his place. In order that the beauty of her appearance might not awaken illicit thoughts among her male scholars "elle avait une petite courtine devant son visage." Christine de Pisan was one of the first women who made a living by their pen, and is said to have lived a life of irreproachable virtue, besides being possessed of great erudition.

The country where the most considerable gain was recorded was Italy. Not only did many Italian women share in the enthusiasm aroused by the Renaissance, but their doings were no longer regarded as unworthy of interest. In Boccaccio's writings, for instance, women occupy a very prominent place, and Chaucer was among those who followed his example. Although a great many writers of the period make the failings of women the object of their satirical remarks, yet there is in their very criticism the wish for something better and nobler, and better still, the conviction that women are capable of improvement.

The Renaissance, with its revival of ancient culture, contained a strong educational element, which, although like the earlier revivals it busied itself only very indirectly with the female half of society, was not without importance to the movement of female emancipation. For in the first place man was the usurper of all authority, and it was only by educating him and widening his horizon that he could be made to recognise the absurdity of the relations between the sexes; and in the second place it was the philosophical spirit of the Renaissance that built its educational speculations upon a solid foundation of thought and method. The educationalists of the Renaissance were not churchmen, but philosophers. The tendency among them — when at all interested in women — is to condemn both the monastic education, which forms devotees instead of mothers, and that secular education which creates literary ladies instead of housewives, and to return to the ancient ideal of womanhood in making them essentially wives and mothers, assuming without discussion the female inferiority.

The most striking exception to this rule was the German Cornelius Agrippa, of Nettesheim, who was the first to state the cause and pronounce upon it in a sense so favourable to female instruction that it

entitles him to the name of "father of feminism". His treatise "*De nobilitate et praecellentia feminini sexus*" (first published in 1505), though naturally crude and immature, and hesitatingly put forward, has that enthusiasm of firm convictions which touches the reader's heart. The rudiments of later contentions are to be found in his plea. The tyranny of men, he says, has deprived woman of her birthright of liberty. Iniquitous laws have prevented her from enjoying it, usage and custom have neglected it, and finally an exclusively sexual education has quite extinguished it. In her youth she is kept a close prisoner at home, as though she were utterly incapable of any more dignified occupation than the performance of domestic duties like a kind of superior servant, and using the needle. Thus she is prepared for the matrimonial yoke which is laid upon her the moment she has attained maturity, that she may quickly serve her chief purpose of propagating the species. She is then delivered up to the oppression of a husband whose inordinate jealousy and fits of temper reduce her to a deplorable condition. Or she is kept all her life in the even more rigorous confinement of a convent, a retreat of so-called virgins and vestals, where she is left to a thousand agonies, the worst among which is a gnawing regret for lost happiness which finishes her.

In a supplementary treatise Agrippa exhorts the husband to regard and to treat his wife as a companion, and not as a servant. He seems almost afraid of the consequences of his audacity when he tries to weaken its effects by acknowledging the natural dominion of the male sex. "However", he adds, "let their rule be all grace and reverence. Although woman be inferior, let her be given a place by the husband's side, that she may be his faithful helpmate and counsellor. Not a slave, but the mistress of the house; not the first among the servants, but the mother of the fine children who are to inherit her husband's property, succeed to his business, and transmit his name to posterity."

Erasmus in his *Dialogues* depicts women as eager to rise out of their conditions of servitude. However much he tempers the force of his argument by continual jokes and pleasantries, yet he seems to sympathise with the female complaint that woman herself has abandoned her cause, leaving the husband to decide all matters of importance and voluntarily resigning all liberty, consigning herself to a life of religious devotion and household duties. The consequence is that men regard them as mere plaything and even deny them the name of human beings. The woman who voices this complaint enume-

rates the various occupations for which her sex would be fit, and winds up by saying that "there is nothing in what she has said which does not deserve serious and mature consideration."

In "*Abbates et Eruditiae*" Erasmus anticipates the problem of female education as it would present itself in later ages. He foresees that there will come a time when women, dissatisfied with the state of bondage, will seek improvement by demanding an education. The innate masculine egoism, however, will realise that learning will make women less submissive to male authority, and they will resist any innovations by which their supremacy may be endangered. The coming struggle is thus foreshadowed by one of the most prominent among the philosophers of the Renaissance, and his sympathies are, upon the whole, with the female sex. He is the first to see the close connexion between the moral worthlessness of females and their need of an education. To remedy the frivolity of women he demanded that girls should be taught some useful occupation, so as to keep them from idleness and its concomitant vices. He also wished for a more liberal intellectual education to be supplied in the family, and, should that be impossible, by the husband.

In full accordance with the above is the main drift of the third of the great humanist's works which show a tendency favourable to women: his "*Christian Marriage*", which made its appearance in 1526. It resolutely prefers the state of matrimony of that of religious celibacy and makes the possibilities of conjugal happiness dependent on the cultivation of the female soul.

Works like the above could not fail to draw to the problem the attention of the reading public, and to make it a favourite topic of controversy. France especially proved an extremely fruitful soil, and the French nation became interested in a regular "querelle des femmes" which inspired a great many pens, and culminated in the third Book of Rabelais' *Pantagruel*. The habit of reviling the female character and satirising the female weaknesses was of mediaeval growth, and may be found illustrated among many other examples in that portion of the "*Roman de la Rose*" which is the work of Jean de Meung, in the "*Lamentations de Matheolus*", of which the late professor van Hamel issued a new edition in 1892, and in a great many "*fabliaux*". It also prevailed in England with great persistence for several centuries. [1]) But the somewhat puerile invective became

1) Cf. the two articles in "*A Cambridge History of English Literature*", by Prof. F. M. Padelford (Vol. 2 p. 384) and by Prof. H. V. Routh (vol. 3 p. 88).

a controversy in France when about the middle of the 15th century the female sex found some staunch defenders among the male French authors. Martin le Franc's "*Champion des Dames*", composed between 1440 and 1442, aroused a great deal of hostile criticism, mostly in the prevailing satirical form and culminating in the "*Grand Blason des Faulces Amours*" by Guillaume-Alexis, and some sympathy, as in the "*Chevalier aux Dames*", an allegorical poem; while some authors, like Robert de Herlin in his "*Acort des mesdisans et biendisans*" tried to reconcile the two parties.

After 1500 the growth of the Renaissance spirit soon caused the controversy to enter into a new phase. The interest it commanded remained undiminished and towards the middle of the century it even increased to immense proportions, without, however, leading to any pronounced tangible results. The progress of learning caused the argument to become intensified into a more serious, philosophical cast. One of the champions of the female sex, at the time when the "quarrel" had reached its acute stage, François du Billon, who also made use of the allegorical device to level his threats at the heads of the revilers of women in his "*Fort inexpugnable de l'honneur fēminin*", narrates how three of the worst sinners are taken prisoner by the gallant defenders of the fortress. They are Boccaccio, Gratien Dupont, seigneur de Drusac, whose "*Controverses*", written in 1534, are full of the fiercest invective against women, and Jean Nevizan, author of a Latin treatise, published in 1521, of which the very lengthy title may be advantageously condensed into "*Sylva nuptialis*". Nevizan's work shows the Renaissance spirit of enquiry into the stores of antiquity in its mention of a great many sources from Christ to Plato and itself became a source of inspiration to Rabelais.

In the years that followed the champions of feminism became identified with the Platonic idealists who were bent upon spiritualising love [1]), whilst its adversaries tried to uphold the ancient "gaulois" traditions with their lower estimate of womanhood. The publication (in 1542) of Antoine Héroët's "*Parfaicte Amye*", with its Platonic notions, heralded a new phase in the history of the "Querelle des Femmes". In its metaphysical tendencies this brief treatise contains a delicate analysis of the emotions attendant upon the pure passion, the chief inspirer of virtue which brings us nearer to God. It ushered in the acute stage, during which not one of the great authors remained

1) Cf. p. 30.

silent on a question which occupied so many minds. The different contributions to the problem under discussion were soon combined in one volume under the name of "*Opuscules d'Amour*". The poets and poetesses of the "école lyonnaise", Maurice Scève, Pernette du Guillet, Louise Labé, and others, ranged themselves among those who tried to introduce a purified love-ideal and also Marguerite, Queen of Navarre [1]) joined the controversialists in her poetry. So general did the interest taken in the issue become, that Rabelais interrupted the narrative of his *Pantagruel* to contribute his reflections on the subject in the Third Book (about 1546). He took his cue from Nevizan's "*Sylva nuptialis*" in introducing the problem as a consequence of speculations regarding the marriage of Panurge. Rabelais proved himself on the whole an anti-feminist, and we have du Billon's authority for the fact that the name "Pantagruéliste" was considered equivalent to that of enemy to the cause of woman. [2])

If we except Christine de Pisan, Marie de Jars de Gournay, and "la Belle Cordière," the Lyons poetess Louise Labé, the number of French female authors was not greatly increased by the Renaissance movement. But the number of women of the higher classes who took part in the great intellectual movement grew all over Europe, particularly in France, England and Spain. One of the most erudite Frenchwomen of the time was Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre, (1492—1549), sister to Francis the First, who welcomed to her court the greatest scholars of the day, and who was herself no mean poetess. It would not be difficult to extend this list with more names of high-placed women who owed their intellectual development to the instruction of special preceptors. Education of this kind became the privilege of the female aristocracy. The schools for the most part refused to admit women; in the convent learning was discouraged because a spirit of free inquiry mostly led to heresy, and for the women of the lower classes nothing at all was done. Their more fortunate sisters learned to speak and write Latin, Greek and Italian, and after 1600 also Spanish, and the abuse by women of Italian words while pretending to speak their own language called forth a strong reaction in 1579, the year which saw Euphues, and the beginning of its influence at the Elizabethan court.

1) See also page 32.

2) A very interesting article on "*Le tiers Livre du Pantagruel et la Querelle des Femmes*" by M. Abel Lefranc, containing an extensive list of contributions to the feminist and the anti-feminist literature of the time, may be found in the "Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes", (Tome II, 1904).

The tendencies of the Reformation pointed in the same direction; they encouraged a spirit of free inquiry and were directly opposed to those of the monastic education. Under Luther's influence a number of lay-schools for girls arose in Germany and the early Reformation thus tried to fill up the gap in female education which the Renaissance had left. Unfortunately the political condition of France in the late 16th century was most unfavourable to educational reform owing to the violence of the religious wars, and it was not until after the Edict of Nantes that a number of Huguenot schools arose. The outlook in the opening years of the 17th century was far from bright; great misery prevailed everywhere, in addition to which the internal wars had brought about a general decay of morals which threatened to become the country's ruin. It was at this critical stage in the history of France that woman had become sufficiently confident of her powers to claim a beneficial share in all matters of social importance. [1]) For the first time in history the Woman Question reached an acute stage. The seventeenth century, which witnessed the deepest abasement of English women, will always be remembered in the history of France as the time of the first self-conscious vindication of female rights. This vindication — except in one or two isolated instances — did not take the form of a direct appeal; it adopted the persuasive method of furnishing convincing evidence of woman's capacity to hold her own both intellectually and morally and even to supply certain elements which were lacking among the opposite sex, for the benefit of French society.

We have seen that in the late sixteenth century the problem came to be a much-discussed one in French literature, which it remained all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. M. Ascoli, in the "*Revue de synthèse historique*" (Tome XIII) has published an extensive bibliography of no fewer than ninety-seven works of a feminist or anti-feminist tendency written between 1564 and 1773, which proves conclusively that the intellectual condition of women remained a subject of contemplation. The thirst for knowledge, as we have seen, had imparted itself to a small category of women whose circumstances enabled them to share the literary pursuits of their menfolks. But even the boldest of these earliest champions in their

1) Heinrich Morf, in his "*Geschichte der französischen Literatur im Zeitalter der Renaissance*" relates that a number of ladies took to frequenting the *Académie de poésie et de musique* founded by Baïf under the auspices of Charles IX; especially after his successor Henry III had transferred its seat to an apartment in the Louvre, whence it came to be called "*Académie du Palais*".

wildest dreams did not go beyond that enfranchisement of the mind which — however important in itself — is only the indispensable first step in female emancipation. Until quite late in the 16th century no women had entered the field as the avowed champions of their sex against the arrogant assertions of male supremacy. The alleged inferiority of women was a theme of frequent discussion only in the works of male authors, who further degraded the sex by the bantering, often insolently satirical tone of their contentions. But no woman had come forward to test the evidence on both sides, far less to enter into competition with men on behalf of her sex. The growing taste for literature had done little or nothing to improve the social position of women ; it unfortunately limited itself to a few privileged women, leaving the rest of womanhood in the obscurity of hopeless ignorance. Thus matters stood when in the first quarter of the seventeenth century two events of great importance in the history of feminism took place, of which the first, abortive though it was, and therefore predoomed to barrenness, represents a deliberate attempt by a woman to constitute herself the champion of her sex ; the second being something in the nature of a social experiment, which, without aiming definitely at the attainment of an exclusively feminist ideal, did more to improve the condition of women than any more direct endeavour. I refer to the work of Marie de Jars de Gournay, and to the establishment of the first *salon* by Catherine de Rambouillet.

The former struck a bold and defiant note, resolutely claiming for her sex equality with men. This audacious assertion stamps her as the pioneer of modern feminism. The remarkable thing about her theories is that without the help of anything like a clearly defined philosophy she strikes the keynote of whatever claim was put forward on behalf of women in later times as a consequence of more than a century of philosophical speculation, the practice of which entailed the all-absorbing consequences of the great Revolution of 1789. When the cause of woman was taken up in England by Mary Wollstonecraft, and grafted upon the larger cause of humanity as its logical consequence, the arguments of her plea were directly derived from that philosophy of liberty, equality and fraternity which may be traced to its origin in Locke, Descartes and Bacon. Yet here was a lady, at a time when Descartes was a mere boy, boldly asserting that nature is opposed to all inequality. "La pluspart de ceux qui prennent la cause des femmes contre cette orgueilleuse preferance

que les hommes s'attribuent, leur rendent le change entier : r'envoyans la preferance vers elles. Moy qui fuys toutes extremitez, je me contente de les esgaler aux hommes : la nature s'opposant pour ce regard autant à la supériorité qu'à l'infériorité." She thus sets about vindicating the equality of her sex in everything except physical strength, going beyond the most daring speculation of any previous author, with the exception of those who, blinded by hate, had put forth theories of female pre-eminence in which in sober moments they themselves hardly believed.

Marie de Gournay ascribed the state of inequality to the circumstance that woman is purposely denied an education by man, who owes his usurped authority to abuse of physical force, which she holds in utter contempt. "Les forces corporelles sont vertus si basses, que la beste en tient plus pardessus l'homme, que l'homme pardessus la femme." Woman is man's inferior in bodily strength only "par la nécessité de port et la nourriture des enfants", compensating her lack of brute force by her delicate mission of propagation. But Mlle de Gournay emphatically asserts the perfectibility of the female mind.

To understand and partly justify the extreme vehemence of the lady's attack upon the opposite sex, whose unmerited contempt of the feminine intellect had deeply injured her feelings, it is necessary to take into account the circumstances of her life, which explain her acerbity. She was a studious woman, — a forerunner of the Hannah Mores and Elizabeth Carters as well as of the Mary Astells and Mary Wollstonecrafts of a later period — whom her exceptional intellectual gifts betrayed into that error so common among the extreme female champions — that of substituting herself for her sex and claiming for all what no one with any discernment would think of refusing her personally. Her mother's attempts to turn her away from literature only irritated her. She had no personal beauty and her entire life was a protracted struggle against indifference, opposition and ridicule, which embittered her beyond measure against that sex which valued the gift of a pleasing appearance above that of a comprehensive mind. Born in or about 1565, she must have been a mere girl when first brought into contact with Montaigne's *Essays*. She expressed her admiration of them in a letter to the author, couched in terms so enthusiastic that the philosopher came to see her, thus laying the foundation of a friendship which was only disturbed by his death in 1592. She became his spiritual daughter, —

his "fille d'alliance" — and took an active part in the publication of the later editions of the *Essays*. She rather conceitedly accounted for the close affection which bound them together as "the sympathy from genius to genius". When Montaigne died, his "fille d'alliance" was in a fair way to become a prominent figure in the literary world, having under his influence written some pedagogical essays, which were favourably received. With the philosopher her chief guide passed away, and subsequent experience seems to have soured her and made her spiteful and old-maidish before her time. Those whose object was to ridicule her represent her with three cats, following her about wherever she went. She met with little sympathy beyond that expressed from chiefly intellectual motives in the correspondence of the learned Dutchwoman Anna Maria Schuurman, and of the renowned Louvain professor Juste Lipse — whose praise of Montaigne's *Essays* had won her instant recognition. But she deserves respect for the courage of her opinions, regardless of the prejudices of her contemporaries, and for standing her ground firmly, often turning ridicule into esteem.

Such was the pioneer whose ideas regarding the position of women are embodied chiefly in a treatise entitled : "*De L'Egalité des Hommes et des Femmes*" and in the "*Grief des Dames*", and further alluded to in her preface to the 1595 edition of Montaigne's *Essays* and in a prose "*Apology*", intended to disarm her ridiculers, in which she protests against being disregarded merely on account of her womanhood. Here, indeed, we are confronted by a sense of personal injury. Concerning "*De L'Egalité*" she says in one of her later writings : "Il faut le soubmettre à la touche par ce que peuvent valoir ses raisons et ses pensées, fortes ou feibles qu'elles soient, et puis apres, par la consideration de son dessein. Sçavoir si ce nouveau biais qu'elle prend, et qui la rend originale, est bon pour relever le lustre et pour verifier les privileges des Dames, opprimez par la tyrannie des hommes."

The treatise "*De L'Egalit* " consists of two parts. In the first, the right of women to equal consideration with men is vindicated by means of evidence derived from the writings of men ; in the second the authority of God himself as contained in the Bible is referred to and expounded in a manner wholly favourable to the doctrine of equality.

Regarding the first point, the author derives comfort from the reflexion that the chief revilers of women are to be found among the

worst specimens of the male sex, who merely repeat the opinions of others, "n'ayans pas appris que la première qualité d'un mal habill' homme, c'est de cautionner les choses soubs la foy populaire et par ouyr dire," in doing which, "d'une seule parolle ils desfont la moitié du Monde. " Their sole aim is to rise at the expense of the female sex. But fortunately there is the testimony of truly great men to prove the mental and moral capacity of women. Here follows a list of the male partisans of some degree of feminism among the philosophers of antiquity and of the renaissance : Plato, Socrates, Plutarch, Seneca, Aristotle, Erasmus, Politian, Agrippa. Montaigne is introduced as "le tiers chef du triumvirat de la sagesse humaine et morale" (with Plutarch and Seneca), for having written that "il se trouve rarement des femmes dignes de commander aux hommes," which she twists into an implication that he holds woman to be the equal of man.

To counterbalance the principles of the Salic law, constructed entirely upon considerations of war, Tacitus' account of the position of women among the Germanic tribes is quoted, together with the example of the Spartans, who in the discussion of their public affairs consulted female opinion.

Marie de Gournay held that the two sexes have equal souls given them ; the institution of a sexual difference having been made exclusively with regard to the propagation of the species. To illustrate which, the author, whom nobody would dream of accusing of levity, bashfully craves permission to quote a popular saying. "Et s'il est permis de rire en passant, le quolibet ne sera pas hors de saison, nous apprenant : qu'il n'est rien plus semblable au chat sur une fenestre, que la chatte."

After passing in review the principal secular authorities with feminist tendencies, Mlle de Gournay tries the more difficult task of reconciling her feminist views to those of the early Christians, taking what she calls "la route des tesmoignages sainets", quoting St. Basil and St. Jerome, and finding herself for the first time somewhat perplexed at the teachings of St. Paul, who forbids preaching by women and enjoins silence , "not because he despises the female sex, but merely lest their beauty and grace, displayed to advantage in a public office, should become a source of temptation to men."

That women have always excelled in religious devotion is demonstrated by means of a reference to the championship of Judith and the martyrdom of Joan of Arc. The mention of the former brings

us to direct Scriptural evidence, which the author finds an even harder subject to tackle. Here, indeed she is sometimes led by her zeal into the most palpable absurdities : "Et si les hommes se vantent, que Jesus-Christ soit nay de leur sexe, on respond qu'il le falloit par nécessaire biensceance, ne se pouvant pas sans scandale, mesler jeune et à toutes les heures du jour et de la nuict parmy les presses, aux fins de convertir, secourir et sauver le genre humain, s'il eust esté du sexe des femmes : notamment en face de la malignité des Juifs."

The entire treatise is mere theorising, and being produced at a time when the public mind on the subject was one mass of inveterate prejudice, brushing aside any speculations of the kind it contained as ridiculous and "paradoxical", it is not astonishing that Marie de Gournay spoke to the winds, and that the practical results of her labour were nihil.

One gets the impression that the author herself was fully convinced of the hopelessness of even obtaining a hearing, and wrote chiefly to relieve herself of the burden of her glowing indignation. To this circumstance it may be attributed that she refrains from formulating any practical claims, or drawing up a scheme of an ideal society in which women were given their due. But her zeal and devotion to the cause she believed to be just were above suspicion, and she has a claim to the gratitude of her sex for having asserted the female equivalence.

If Mlle de Gournay combined in her person some of the elements of the social reformer, there certainly is nothing sensational about her personality and way of expressing her views, and she must be described as revolutionary in a limited sense. Apart from her extreme feminism, her social and political views were quite conventional, and in her preface to "*De l'Egalité*" she even seeks the patronage of Queen Anne, as the most prominent and influential member of her sex. François Poullain de la Barre, however, who half a century later became heir to her spiritual legacy, was an out-and-out revolutionist, whose theories of female equality proceeded from generally revolutionary tendencies. Like Mlle de Gournay, he was a theorist, but he differed from her in being above all a philosopher of the school of Descartes, and the first to apply the doctrine of Cartesianism to social problems. This consideration renders him important not merely as the direct advocate of the cause of woman, in which capacity his efforts met with no success whatever, but as the forerunner of J. J. Rousseau in his theory of human rights, which in its turn became

the basis of the feminist movement in England in the last years of the next century, inaugurated by Mary Wollstonecraft. As M. Piéron puts it, "le chemin réel ira de Descartes au féminisme par la Révolution, et non de Descartes à la révolution par le féminisme."

M. Rousselot, in drawing attention to Poullain de la Barre, refers to his works as "now almost forgotten." [1]) The utter obscurity in which this author remained buried for two centuries is probably due to his life of retirement, — as M. Henri Grappin has pointed out in opposition to M. Piéron's opinion, who, basing himself upon evidence of style and language, adjudged him to be a frequent visitor to salons — to his complete indifference to worldly fame, and to this freedom from worldly ambitions. His work, like that of Mlle de Gournay, was received with a mixture of scorn and ridicule, and soon forgotten. A century later, some of the works of the Encyclopedians, which developed the same social ideas — with a striking difference in the matter of female education, — were burnt by the common hangman by order of the authorities, who could not, however, prevent the new ideas from taking root and bearing fruit. In striking contrast, Poullain, whose revolutionism found few sympathisers and was consequently adjudged harmless, was left at peace, and brought out his revolutionary treatises "avec privilège du Roy", and "avec permission signée de la Reynie", for which he paid with disregard and oblivion. Both Mary Wollstonecraft and Poullain should have been born in the nineteenth century, but whereas the former was the embodiment of that indomitable spirit of rebellion which had taken almost a century to mature, Poullain stands revealed to the modern reader, a living anachronism. There is something in his "fanaticism of ideas" which anticipates the intellectual "tours de force" of William Godwin, whose eccentric genius, however, was made subservient to the larger cause of mankind.

Born at Paris in 1647, it seems that Poullain chiefly studied theology at the University of his native city, until the discontent which was roused in him by the system of education followed there, made

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1) P. Rousselot. *Histoire de l'Education des Femmes en France.*

Poullain de la Barre owes his revival to an article by M. Henri Piéron in the "*Revue de Synthèse historique*" of 1902. The latter's judgment is based upon two works: "*De l'Egalité des Sexes*" and "*De l'éducation des Dames*", which he found in the Bibliothèque Nationale. In 1913 the "*Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*" contained an article by M. Henri Grappin, pointing out that some of Poullain's works had been overlooked, supplying a full list of his literary productions and fully discussing one, entitled: "*De l'Excellence des Hommes, contre l'Egalité des Sexes.*" The above-named three are the only treatises by Poullain which bear upon the position of women.

him yield to the intellectual allurements of Cartesianism. Descartes had been dead some dozen years when the great vogue of his philosophy began. Poullain became a fervent Cartesian and after some years turned Protestant, which religion he felt to be better suited to his philosophical ideas. He lived mostly at Paris and at Geneva, and died at the latter place in 1723.

Although Poullain seems to shrink from openly confessing himself influenced by Descartes, his works show the rationalist tendencies of pronounced Cartesianism, to which we shall often have occasion to refer in coming chapters. He may be called one of the forerunners of the Encyclopedians, anticipating their imperturbable rationalism, their contempt of tradition and custom, — which, by a somewhat sophistic turn of reasoning, they call superstition and prejudice, — their habit of referring to original principles, and above all their absolute faith in the perfectibility of mankind through the education of the mind and in the certainty of unlimited human progress. No theory had ever been put forward which contained brighter promises for the future of the human race, and the enthusiasm which it awakened was not damped by the fatal experience of the failure of former experiments. To this circumstance must be ascribed the boundless optimism of the partisans of the new philosophy and their radicalism.

The three feminist treatises, in the order of their publication, were :

1. "*De L'Egalité des deux sexes, discours physique et moral où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugés.*" (1673) ;

2. "*De L'Education des Dames, pour la conduite de l'esprit dans les sciences et dans les moeurs.*" (1674) ;

3. "*De l'Excellence des Hommes, contre l'Egalité des sexes, avec une dissertation qui sert de réponse aux objections tirées de l'Ecriture Sainte contre le sentiment de l'Egalité.*" (1675).

Of these, the second may be dismissed in a few words, as containing nothing very striking beyond the author's dissatisfaction with the spirit prevailing at the Universities.

The first, on the other hand, contains the gist of Poullain's contentions. We are exhorted to judge only from evidence, without regarding the opinions of others, and are brought face to face with what the author holds to be the unvarnished truth, unaffected by that spirit of misplaced gallantry which he feels to be particularly offensive. If, therefore, anybody is shocked at the crudeness of some statements, he expects him to blame Truth, and not Poullain de la Barre.

Conventionalism is what the author holds to be the chief source

of the prevailing inequality. In conformity with the tenets of the Christian faith, people are taught to regard the submission of women as the will of God, whereas Reason shows it to be merely the consequence of inferior strength. To maintain this usurped supremacy men have purposely kept women from being instructed. In many respects the capabilities of women are superior to those of men : it is their special province to study medecine and by its aid to restore health to the sick and ailing. There is, in fact, nothing for which he pronounces women to be unfit : "il faut reconnaitre que les femmes sont propres à tout." He would make them judges, preachers and even generals.

The faults of women, which even this fanaticist of Reason cannot overlook in the face of the distressing state of female manners and morals, are due to the defective education which is given them. They are taught to feel an interest only in balls, theatres and the fashions, with the result that vanity is their predominant characteristic. So far we might be listening to some English moralist of the eighteenth century. Their only literature is of a devotional kind, "avec ce qui est dans la cassette," Poullain meaningly adds. For a girl to display any knowledge she may have acquired is thought a shame, and makes her a "précieuse" in the eyes of everybody.

The only state of dependence which finds favour in Poullain's eyes is that of children on their parents. Here again, we have the purely rational view which was also Mary Wollstonecraft's. The reason of a child is undeveloped, and therefore requires the support of full-grown reason. But this dependence naturally comes to an end as soon as that age is reached when the faculty is sufficiently developed to enable the child to judge for himself, when advice may take the place of command.

Pierre Bayle informs us that Poullain fully expected to be taken to task for this daring vindication of the right of woman to be educated. However, as two years passed without bringing the looked-for refutation of his arguments, he himself anticipated his opponents by writing the third treatise. Its title is rather misleading. As a matter of fact, the pamphlet itself presents the usual arguments in favour of the theory of male excellence with which the arsenal of anti-feminists was stocked, whilst the "remarques nécessaires" by which it is followed, demonstrating the author's opinions, contain the entire feminist theory. The spirit that was to conduct straight to the Revolution breaks out when the author confidently states that as yet feminism is only a matter of theoretical speculation, and not ripe

for social or political action. He next enters upon a diatribe against civilisation, which has failed to bring humanity any nearer to absolute truth, and extols the never-failing power of Reason.

However interesting treatises like the above may be in the evidence they contain of what was secretly going on, of the mental processes which occupied individuals when conventionalism was at its height, processes which contained in them the germs of the great upheaval of a later century, yet it cannot be sufficiently insisted on that they were only abortive eruptions, showing that the social volcano was very far from being extinct; mere puffs of smoke which the slightest breath of wind dispersed. Of far greater direct importance to the growth of opinions was that social movement which began in the early seventeenth century, of which woman was herself the originator, and by means of which she almost leapt into the seat of social influence: the movement of the *salons*. We have seen that it was in the sixteenth century that woman made her triumphal entry into society and began to dominate the world of conversation and of literature. The chivalrous worship of earlier centuries had degenerated without doing anything permanent to increase the esteem in which women stood. But in the sixteenth century a new form of courtship was introduced from Italy and Spain, which was utilised by clever women as a means of gaining the ascendancy over men.

The love theory evolved by Plato, with its metaphysical conception of the passion, which in the Greek philosopher's days had fallen on deaf ears, was carried into practice two thousand years later under the auspices of the great Renaissance. In accordance with the views of Plato's circle, love came to be recognised as the chief inspirer of virtue and of noble deeds. The platonic ideal thus was from the beginning a refining influence, a corrective to coarseness and materialism, and an incentive to the purest idealism. The theory of spiritualised love recognised the love of physical beauty only as the first step on the ladder of Beauty connecting Earth with Heaven; at each new step, however, the ideal becomes transfigured and purified, until everything earthly sinks into nothingness, the Soul becomes paramount and everything else falls away. This view was adopted by the intellectual leaders of the Italian Renaissance, Dante and Petrarch, and also by the leading churchmen, in whose speculations the highest and purest form of passion became the love of God. The spirit of Platonism thus became mingled with that of religious mysticism, which even surpassed Plato in its condemnation

of that earthly love which the latter had recognised. The Florentine Academy, however, adopted the Platonic view, making human love one of the steps leading to the ideal of eternal beauty; and refining upon it until it became the chaste passion of the sacrifice of self to the loved object, of which the passion of Michel Angelo and Vittoria Colonna furnishes an example.

The Italian wars of the late fifteenth century had brought Lewis the Twelfth and his retinue to Genoa. One of the highly-cultured ladies of that city, Tommassina Spinola, made a deep impression upon the king. She was married and virtuous, and so the royal lover had to control his passion and to be content with that platonic friendship which made of the lady "la dame de ses pensées", and entitled him to nothing beyond the purest and most disinterested friendship. A great many parallel cases occurred among the king's followers, and the women found their influence upon their platonic lovers far greater and more lasting than that exercised over the husband in matrimony. There was in this new form of courtship, — which in literature often took a pastoral form, — an element of idealism which placed the weaker sex on a pedestal in putting the adored one far beyond the reach of the lover, who only aspired the more faithfully for not having his passion gratified. In this lay the dormant power of womanhood, which might be successfully turned into a means of improving their position in society; and as soon as women came to realise this they made the most of their opportunity. The "Platonic friendship craze" spread to France, where the sentimental passion of these "Jansenists of love" found a fruitful soil. Before this new form of worship all class-distinctions fell away; not unfrequently the lady was so high above the lover's reach as to exclude all possibility of gratification, which only added an additional zest to the adventure.

Unfortunately the morals of the French court were not such as to encourage the hope of a permanent improvement in the relations between the sexes. The antithesis between the platonic ideals and the brutal coarseness of sexual desire, ill-concealed under a varnish of hypocritical gallantry, was indeed very marked. At the court of Francis physical beauty was considered far above virtue. The years following the introduction of the female element and the rise of female influence at court witnessed a long and bitter struggle between the coarse manners which the long years of warfare had engendered, regarding women as the playthings of men, to be trifled with and to be lightly thrown away when used, and the newly-introduced

"galanterie" which implied patient and disinterested worship of an object, superior in the possession of that beauty of feature which was regarded as the reflection of a beautiful soul. Women had become conscious of their growing influence, and of the means of increasing it. This struggle for recognition found expression in literature in the "*Contes de la reine de Navarre*", written by Marguerite after her marriage, and modelled upon Boccacio's *Decamerone*, the evident purpose of which was to correct French manners and morals, and to glorify that form of love which is a mixture of the worship of chivalry and the platonic passion. The *Contes* themselves show a certain looseness of morals which is rather a concession to the general taste of the times, but the prologues and epilogues are of a far more refined character, and breathe a spirit of platonic idealism. In their celebration of virtue and the pure, idealistic passion it inspires, the *Contes* are a precursor of Mlle de Scudéry's later romances. Instead of the deceitful, hypocritical homage of feudal times, the demand was for women to be respected and to be recognised as the social equals of men.

The first serious attempt made by the ladies of the French court to better their position ended disastrously. Their influence was more than discounted by the demoralising effects of the wars and by the gross libertinism of the male leaders of society. The more determined among the women, finding the task of reforming the morals of a dissolute court beyond their strength, resolved to cultivate in their own private circles that refinement of manners and higher civilisation which the court refused to adopt. Thus arose the famous *salons* of the seventeenth century, in which the struggle for the emancipation of the female mind was combined with that for the improvement of contemporary morals, the refinement of contemporary taste, and the purification of the French language and literature.

"Depuis le salon de Madame de Rambouillet jusqu'au salon de Madame Récamier", says M. Ferdinand Brunetière, "l'histoire de la littérature francaise pourrait se faire par l'histoire des salons." This statement by an eminent critic implies a magnificent eulogy of women and testifies to the magnitude of their literary influence during the whole of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for the history of the *salons* is the history of indirect feminism. Nor was their influence restricted to literature; in nearly every department of social life French women rose to ascendancy; and this, too, at a time when the subjugation of their sex in the other countries of Europe, and notably in England, was most complete. After the great triumphs

of the first half-century of their existence, the *salons* shared in the general decline, to be revived with a fair amount of success, — although of a somewhat different kind — in the eighteenth century.

Woman thus became a social influence to be reckoned with. The question may be put whether upon the whole this remarkable event was favourable to the cause of feminism? For, however much the movement of "preciosity" did to make women realise their independence, and assert their individuality, its original tendencies were not towards any appreciable increase of female instruction. The leaders of the movement: Mme de Rambouillet and her daughters, and afterwards Mme de Sévigné and Mme de la Fayette, detested the "femme savante" quite as much as they hated ignorance. The only aim of the education they recommended was to make women fit for the society in which they were expected to move; manners, taste and wit were cultivated at the expense of those qualities which are indispensable to rouse a spirit of pure feminism. The "précieuses" were bent upon cultivating sentiment rather than intellect, and — apart from the fact that sentiment is rather apt to run riot and that many women have a natural surplus which does not require cultivation — it is by a well-regulated intellect that the cause of feminism will be best served. As it was, the essentially feminine qualities were cultivated by the *salons*, and the sexual difference emphasized. It must therefore be admitted that the *salons* only very indirectly furthered the feminist movement and that the interest evinced by the "précieuses" in the equality problem and its levelling tendencies was naturally slight. But it stands to their credit that they compelled men to recognise the importance of sex in other matters than those which are purely sexual. If the cause of feminism in the days of the *salons* had been in a more advanced state, the ladies who frequented them might have turned anti-feminist in their horror of social changes which threatened to rob them of the empire which their essentially feminine qualities had so easily secured over men.

The better "précieuse" was not an intellectual; she was expected to conceal such knowledge as she might possess and to cherish that "pudeur sur la science" which makes Mme de Lambert refer to her secret "débauches d'esprit", and which became the prevailing sentiment also among her Bluestocking sisters of the eighteenth century.

The history of the French *salons* and of the "précieuses" who peopled them begins in the year 1613, when Catherine, marquise de Rambouillet invited to her town residence all those who, like herself,

felt disgusted at the camp-manners prevailing at the court and at the licentiousness of the language and literature practised there. The Rambouillet-assemblies, in their original intention a reaction against the "esprit gaulois", accomplished far more than they aimed at in securing for women a prominent place in French society. They became a powerful factor in that thorough reform of manners and of language which became the glory of the century and which, whatever excesses may have followed in its train, did away for good and all with coarseness and brutality. Of the very questionable society at court it might be said that "force prevailed, while grace was wanting"; the latter essentially feminine quality was abundantly supplied at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, where the feminine element found its way into literature; and conversation, which hitherto had been masculine, became the means of introducing a new language for new manners.

In opposition to the scant respect with which women were treated in court-circles, an ideal of love was set up which was more in accordance with the platonic sentiment. Once again the virginal state became an object of glorification. The state of matrimony, on account of its coarser foundation, was relegated to an inferior position. To the crude, almost offensive lovemaking of the courtier was opposed the modest, unselfish worship of platonic love of a pastoral kind; and the representative poetry of the period, some of which was the work of women, exalted the platonic passion which was to revolutionize the relations of the sexes. The warrior-lover of the feudal past, who was only a tyrant under the mask of chivalrous adulation, gave way to the "honnête homme", or knight without an armour, of whom it could be said that he possessed "la justesse de l'esprit et l'équité du coeur", safe-guarding him against error of judgment and excess of passion, and making him the devoted and constant lover of his mistress. The following enumeration is given of his duties: "aimer le monde, aimer les lettres sans affectations; mais surtout être amoureux et rechercher la conversation des femmes". Anybody wishing to be admitted to polite society had to conform to these rules. The tone of conversation was characterised by a spirit of "galanterie", a kind of chivalry of words and actions, which was to inspire men to noble feelings and to corresponding deeds.

Mme de Rambouillet attracted to her salon not only men and women of the aristocracy, but also a great many men-of-letters, who were valued according to their literary merit, regardless of fortune and

importance. This close alliance between the female sex and the men of culture was in some respects the best education the former could have chosen. They were bent on proving once for all, as Fléchier puts it, that "l'esprit est de tout sexe" and that nothing was wanting to make women the intellectual equals of men, but the habit of being instructed and the liberty of acquiring useful knowledge. Women became the unchallenged arbitresses of morals, taste, language, literature and wit, in all of which they themselves set the example. In a contemporary work we find the earliest salon described as "l'école de Madame de Rambouillet, qui a renouvelé en partie les moeurs, où l'on mettait sa gloire dans une conduite irréprochable." Not only was the language purified by removing its overgrowth of obscenity and indelicacy, but it was divested of a number of superfluous and affected foreign words. The female influence upon the literary taste was equally all-embracing. A number of new words owed their existence to feminine initiative, and although the writers of the very first class were on the whole unfavourably disposed towards what came to be called "préciosité", and were consequently inclined to satirise its excesses, a great deal of respectable second class talent was lavished upon the frequenters of the salons.

The literature produced by the "habitués" of Mme de Rambouillet's salon was mostly of an occasional nature, and composed in homage to the female sex, comprising sonnets, madrigals, epistolary prose, and plays. The literature of the Scudéry circle, besides the products of a growing pedantry, also included many occasional pieces of a lighter kind, among which were so-called sonnets-énigmes, vers-échos and the like, which, if contributing to the enjoyment of an idle moment, had no permanence whatever as literature. To this kind of poetry the ladies themselves were important contributors. In M. Victor du Bled's "*La société française*" we read about a "Journée des Madrigaux" at Mlle de Scudéry's, occasioned by a present of a "cachet de cristal" made to the hostess on one of her famous Saturdays, calling forth poetical ebullitions from the most widely different authors. There were the famous "Portrait" series, composed by the ladies of the Duchess of Montpensier's circle; the written "Conversations", — those by Mlle de Scudéry herself were judged by Mme de Maintenon to contain "useful hints to young females" and therefore introduced at St. Cyr — and a very extensive literature in the epistolary style, which was to become the current form of the Richardsonian novel.

The topics of the day also formed a subject of animated discussion at the assemblies. Among them the social position of women and their treatment by the male sex occasionally found a place. Dissertations on literary subjects alternated with discussions of intellectual problems, one of the themes at Mlle de Scudéry's being : "De quelle liberté les femmes doivent-elles jouir dans la société ?" Although the salons of the seventeenth century were not so revolutionary in their tendencies as some of the next, inasmuch as they were strictly private and did not either directly or indirectly aim at subverting the existing government or promoting seditious theories, yet political subjects were not shunned, and even philosophy and science — the craze of the salons of the early eighteenth century — found a number of devotees and sympathisers. About the middle of the seventeenth century, Cartesianism became the fashionable philosophy in spite of the opposition of the universities. Mme de Sévigné's letters prove that many women were interested in its propagation. The "précieuses" felt attracted by the speculations of Descartes, to follow which the cultivation of a sound sense of logic is more indispensable than any great erudition. The consequence of the philosophical movement was a widening interest in knowledge, an awakening curiosity about science, and a corresponding contempt of tradition, resulting from that self-reliance which is the natural outcome of the theory of human perfectibility.

The two principal salons, those of the marquise de Rambouillet and of Mlle de Scudéry, although of the same general tendencies, differed somewhat in their particulars. The glory of the former and earlier was never equalled by any subsequent one. The marquise herself was in every respect an ornament of her sex. Born and bred in Italy, she married the marquis de Rambouillet before she had reached the age of thirteen. After some turbulent years at court she retired to the privacy of her residence in the Rue Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre and became the centre of a brilliant circle of aristocratic people and celebrated men-of-letters. Although some of the greatest wits of the age frequented her salon — Malherbe, and afterwards Corneille and Balzac were among her occasional visitors — there never was question of a domination of literary men : the hostess remained enthroned in full and undisputed authority, receiving the verbal and written homage which they paid to her virtues.

The entire house was reconstructed after her own ideas, so as to afford more room for the reception of guests. In one of the apart-

ments which opened into each other, the marquise was in the habit of keeping her state, receiving her visitors while reclining upon a luxurious couch. The Blue Room, which, by the way, changed its aspect with each succeeding fashion, was a marvel of refined taste. Nor did the marquise confine her receptions to her town-residence ; assemblies were held at Rambouillet in summer and garden-parties introduced plenty of variety. Great praise has been lavished on her kindness of character, and rising authors in particular found in her a warm-hearted patroness, always ready to applaud and encourage. One of her daughters, Julie d'Angennes, equalled her in popularity and had her beauty and virtue celebrated in a collection of laudatory verse entitled "*La Guirlande de Julie*", to which different poets made contributions, the principal being the young marquis de Montausier, who afterwards became her husband. Among her closest intimates were two men of a very much inferior social station : Voiture, the chief poet and chronicler, and Chapelain, the chief oracle and critic of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. She had made these two her own ; they basked in the serenity of her smile, shared in her joys as in her troubles, and were the most perfect male satellites to female beauty and brilliance.

The years between 1630 and 1645 were the crowning years of glory in the history of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. After Julie's marriage, however, there came a decline. There were some sudden deaths, including that of the marquise's only son, and the Fronde began, in which some of the marquise's intimates followed the fortunes of the rebels, entailing fresh partings. In 1652 she sustained a further loss through the death of her husband. Bowed down with sorrow, she retired to Rambouillet to seek comfort in the intimacy of Julie's family.

The influence of the Hôtel de Rambouillet passed on to the circle presided over by Madeleine de Scudéry, whose "Saturdays" were much sought after. Her visitors were rather more given to affectations of manners and speech than those of her aristocratic predecessor and the transfer therefore marks the first step in the decadence which set in. In her "ruelle" the Third Estate was largely represented ; in fact, as the "bourgeois" element gained in strength, the decadence became more marked, for its representatives were more easily led into excesses than the female members of the aristocracy. This explains how the name of Mlle de Scudéry — rather unjustly — came to be identified with that false preciosity which did the female cause such harm. And yet she was herself an ardent feminist, not

only in the qualified sense of her predecessor, but in the full sense of the word. Her two principal romances : "*Artamène, ou le grand Cyrus*" and "*Clélie*", derive an interest — which their longwindedness greatly endangers — from their marked feminist tendencies. In the former, Mlle de Scudéry, whose views are expressed by Sapho, pleads for mental occupation as the only means of promoting female virtue. She rebukes the vanity of ignorance so common among those of her sex who imagine that "elles ne doivent jamais rien savoir, si ce n'est qu'elles sont belles, et ne doivent jamais rien apprendre qu'à se bien coiffer". She is also one of the first to accuse the male sex of inconsistency, refusing their womenfolk an education, yet finding fault with them for lacking those qualities which are the fruit of education only. "Sérieusement, y a-t-il rien de plus bizarre que de voir comment on agit pour l'ordinaire en l'éducation des femmes ? On ne veut pas qu'elles soient coquettes ni galantes, et on leur permet pourtant d'apprendre soigneusement tout ce qui est propre à la galanterie, sans leur permettre de savoir rien qui puisse fortifier leur vertu, ni occuper leur esprit". But the "femme savante" equally inspires her with profound disgust, and this some of her critics have failed to recognize. The Damophile of the *Grand Cyrus* is an exact reproduction of the Philaminte of Molière's "*Femmes Savantes*", pretending to an erudition which is only imaginary and prevents her from attending to her household duties. There is nothing more objectionable in Mlle de Scudéry 's opinion than for a woman to make parade of her knowledge, which may be useful chiefly in enabling her to listen with appreciation when men were talking. The theory of perfect equality, proposed about the same time by Poullain de la Barre, did not find an adherent in Mlle de Scudéry. The "honnête homme" of her dreams has more power of diverting and amusing than the most erudite of her own sex. Of all the leading ladies of seventeenth century French society there were none whose qualifications would have fitted them so perfectly to be the rivals of Mrs. Montagu in presiding over Bluestocking assemblies as Mlle de Scudéry!

Her second great romance, "*Clélie*", marks the culminating point of the usual seventeenth century feminism in expressing the rather one-sided ideal to which the ladies of the salons aspired, that of commanding the love of gallantry and of ruling the world through it. The entire romance is nothing but an elaborate code of gallantry by which all love is to be regulated. In some passages, however, the social position of women becomes the theme, regardless of the rather

too obtrusive love-theories. After protesting indignantly against female bondage, Mlle de Scudéry proves that the doctrine of gallantry has not impaired her judgment. She demands that man shall be "neither the tyrant nor the slave of woman", and that the rights and duties of matrimony shall be equally shared between the two partners. Nor has the glitter of the platonic love-arsenal blinded her to the blessings of the virginal state. Far superior to matrimony she holds the condition of the wise and (of course !) beautiful woman who, although much courted, remains indifferent ; who has many friends, but no lovers ; who lives and moves in a world which to her is without peril, unswayed by the passions which rule others, always free and always virtuous — and, we may add, always sublimely conscious of her own superiority — an ideal embodied in the person of Plotine.

The attempt at "regulating the passions", i.e. keeping the affections under perfect control, no doubt led to a great deal of absurdity which supplied the many antagonists with weapons against "la préciosité." Some of the worst sinners in this respect were ladies of the Scudéry circle. There was a certain Mlle Dupré, given to philosophy, and surnamed "la Cartésienne" whose glory was to consider herself incapable of tenderness ; and, worse still, there was the example of her friend Mlle de la Vigne, whose infatuation went so far as to make her reject even the comforts of platonic worship.

Mlle de Scudéry herself was more moderate in her ideas, and proved capable of cherishing some "tendresse" for the poet Pellisson whom she rescued from the Bastille. Her verdict that "la vraie mesure du mérite doit se prendre sur la capacité qu'on a d'aimer" even suggests that she was capable of undergoing the real passion. Gradually, however, the excesses in false "préciosité" began to multiply. The original signification of the term had been a taste for whatever is refined and delicate ; noble, grand and sublime. The affectation and pedantry which came to be substituted for this, gave rise to the worst excesses of language. In their admiration of the fine phrasing of the literary masterpieces the "précieuses" took to substituting their periphrases and metaphors for the simple mode of expression which daily conversation requires [1]), making themselves ridiculous and objectionable in the eyes of soberminded people and calling forth some malignant attacks even by people who could not be accused of misogynist leanings. To make matters worse, some very inferior

1) Cf. Livet, *Précieux et Précieuses*, p. XXV.

imitations of the aristocratic salons had sprung up among the "bourgeoisie" both at Paris and in the provinces, where prudery was substituted for purity, affectation for elegance and pedantry for charm and taste. The moral tone prevailing at these meetings also compared very unfavourably with the atmosphere of culture and good breeding which had reigned at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Scandal became a favourite topic of conversation, and literary men of a usurped reputation, to whom the better circles remained closed, laid down the law and constituted themselves the arbiters of literary taste. The decline, which had been slow and partial in the salons of Mlle de Scudéry and afterwards of Mme Deshoulières, became rapid and complete in those of the so-called "bourgeoisie de qualité".

M. Brunetière has pointed out that the "esprit précieux" of the salons, aiming at polish and refinement — for which in later years it came to substitute narrowness and affectation — was directly opposed to the "esprit gaulois" which had the upper hand in court circles and whose satire of the salons often degenerated into cynicism and coarseness. The great authors found themselves occupying an intermediate position, trying to reconcile what was recommendable in either and ridiculing what was objectionable. The fact that they drew their inspiration from Nature and from the lessons taught by antiquity brought them into conflict with the précieuses who lived in an artificial present, and eagerly welcomed whatever was new. In the Ancient and Modern Controversy, which was started in the seventeenth century and revived in the early eighteenth, the female element, with a very few exceptions, unhesitatingly took the side of the Moderns. How powerful a factor they had become in determining what was to be the public opinion appears from the share they had in the ultimate victory of the Moderns, and more still from the utter futility of the repeated efforts made by men of the first genius to crush their power by means of ridicule. Molière opened the campaign in his "*Précieuses Ridicules*" (1659). Although very successful as a play, and warmly applauded by the Rambouillet-circle, it missed its aim in utterly failing to crush false "préciosité". When after Molière's death Boileau continued the campaign, he met with no better success. No sooner had he retired from the field than the monster he had set out to kill reared its head again, enjoying undisputed possession until Mme de Lambert and her friends made an endeavour to return to the old ideals; in doing which, however, they did not forget to march with the times and to observe the signs

of impending change which were beginning to manifest themselves.

While the "précieuse" society of the salons in its anxiety to strengthen the female element was occupying itself with the cultivation of polished manners, taste and wit in the members of the sex, and came to neglect female morals and instruction, the problem of a moral education was introduced and discussed by a philosopher among churchmen, the great Fénelon. The civil wars in France were followed by a religious renaissance, representing a supreme effort made by catholicism to recover the ground which had been lost to the combined classical renaissance and reformation. The religious order of the Jesuits, founded in the middle of the sixteenth century, saw in a strictly religious education the means of strengthening the position of the Roman Catholic church. Before the end of the century they had their colleges in different parts of France and became the educators of the Roman Catholic youth of that country. From the first their aim was the attainment of political influence for the church by means of religious propaganda. To this end they tried to suppress all spontaneity and individuality in their pupils, a system which in that age of awakening individualism and philosophical enquiry could not long remain without protest. A reaction set in which aimed at combining a certain amount of personal freedom and patriotic sense with religious sentiment, and at reconciling the tenets of Catholicism with the theories of the new philosophy. Such was the general character of the first great rival of Jesuitism, the "Oratoire".

Neither society, however, took any notice of female education. The omission was repaired by the Jansenists, the implacable enemies of the Jesuits, be it in a manner in which some sound common sense was mingled with a good deal of narrow dogmatism. For a number of years they maintained a somewhat precarious footing in France, during which time they proved themselves zealous educators, to whom the moral interests of their pupils, and not the worldly ones of their society, were paramount. Their chief educational establishment at Port Royal, founded in 1643, was in many ways superior to contemporary institutions, and some of their methods have found imitation in France to this very day.

It is true that the Jansenist system of education was, upon the whole, a monastic one, and as such could not be a very great improvement. But its practice was distinguished by a few characteristics

which made it superior to all parallel schemes of education. Nowhere do we find that perfect purity of motives, that eagerness on the part of the educator to keep his charges from temptation and evil. This circumstance found its origin in the tenets of Jansenism, asserting that a tendency to sin and evil is inherent in the infant soul. To the Jansenists, education meant the unrelaxing struggle of the educator, aided by divine grace, against this natural bias, for the purpose of saving the soul. That this constant watchfulness on the teacher's part involved the total disappearance of the last frail spark of liberty left to the child, is only natural. On the other hand, it strengthened the affections. The Jansenist "religieuses" were filled with a most laudable sense of responsibility and loved their charges with the most unselfish tenderness and devotion. Their individual kindness tempered the severity of the rules laid down in Jacqueline Pascal's "*Règlement pour les enfants*". (1657).

The discipline was of the strictest, and the entire system directed towards forming pious Christian women and docile wives, rich in virtue rather than in knowledge. The final decision was left to the girls themselves; they either became nuns or re-entered the world after some years of close sequestration, "selon qu'il plaisait à Dieu d'en disposer", but it is to be feared that some moral pressure was often brought to bear upon them. The rules for daily observance implied early rising, strict silence, very limited ablutions and the greatest simplicity in dress; the hours of daylight being divided among prayers, devotional literature, manual labour and the elements of practical knowledge.

The above will be sufficient to show that Port Royal was a convent rather than a school and that its spirit was directly opposed to both the Renaissance spirit and the philosophical spirit of the later generations. In the annals of female education the "Petites Ecoles" of Port Royal will therefore not be remembered as a milestone in the march of Woman towards the ideal of perfect enfranchisement. They derive their importance from the fact that they were among the very first institutions in which great stress was laid on a moral education and in which some attention was paid to psychology.

The convents of other religious orders also participated in the educational movement and tried to recover lost influence. The seclusion of convent-life in those days was not nearly so strict as it had been in the days of early christianity, and this concession gained for them many pupils who had no intention of taking the veil, but

were merely obeying the increasing call for female instruction. Some of these religious orders, as for instance the Ursulines, did good service, although they aimed at the pursuit of the moral virtues rather than intellectual accomplishments. What constitutes their chief merit, however, is the fact that by the side of the existing boarding-schools for paying resident pupils they established dayschools for the benefit of the poorer classes, in which all instruction was gratuitous. The number of secular schools for girls was so small, that we may safely regard the above as a first attempt to bring education within the reach of the untaught female multitude. Unfortunately, the convent-schools became involved in the general decline which marks the latter half of the century. All sorts of abuses found their way into them. A great deal too much regard was paid to the social standing of pupils, the nuns were often unfit for their educational task, for which they lacked preparation, and many convents became havens of refuge to worldly ladies with a damaged reputation, who paid well, but in return introduced lazy morals and a loose conversational tone. Add to this the intense and general misery which both the Fronde and the later foreign wars had engendered, and it need not astonish anybody that the efforts of the religious orders were of too partial and desultory a nature to bring about a lasting improvement in female education. Although the actual progress recorded was slight, yet something had been gained. The necessity for some degree of female instruction — thanks largely to the indirect influence of the salons — was now universally granted, although opinions varied regarding the extent and the means to be employed. It had to a certain extent become a topic in France, and as such began to attract a good deal of notice among moral philosophers. There arose the philosophy of education, making the subject a basis for philosophical speculation and applying to the systems then in vogue the severe test of Reason. In this way some glaring abuses were revealed which urgently demanded correction. The entire monastic system, based upon conventional grounds, was full of faults and the reverse of practical, showing an utter disregard of the demands of life. Thus began the gradual emancipation of education from the shackles of monasticism, the urgent necessity of which was recognised even by some of the leading churchmen, whose works breathe the more liberal spirit of the new philosophy. The theorisings of Fénelon mark a new departure in moral education, and his ideas became the prevailing ones of the eighteenth century which he heralded. He did not fall

into the error made by his predecessors of overlooking the female half of society, but placed himself on the standpoint that the education of women is as important a social problem as that of men. At the time of the composition of his treatise "*De l'Education des Filles*" (published in 1683) he was director of the "Nouvelles Catholiques", a Parisian institution in which female converts from Protestantism were educated. Its direct claims on behalf of woman — apart from absolute insistence on the right of a moral education — are rather modest, but its originality consists in the introduction of the problems of feminine psychology, lifting the subject into the sphere of moral philosophy. Unmoved by the passion which swayed some of the later feminists — there is a wide gulf between his ideal of morality and theirs of equality — the moderation of his views and the soundness of his logic gained him a hearing and procured him some staunch supporters among the better Précieuses, who justly admired his insight into the female character. Madame de Maintenon was very much taken with his ideas and even procured him an appointment to the archbishopric of Cambrai. While insisting on the fundamental difference between the male and the female character, Fénelon never hesitates to put woman on the same level as man, without troubling to decide the theoretical question of superiority. The all-important promise of eternity he believed to apply with perfect equality to both sexes, and as regards earthly life he held that man and woman are too fundamentally different to allow of comparison in the sense of competition. However, he recognised that while the chief duties of man were concerned with social life, those of woman lay within a smaller circle : that of the home, upon the management of which depend both the happiness of every individual and the prosperity of the state ; thus granting to woman a sphere of interest and activity in no wise inferior to, though different from, that of man, and exhorting her to fulfil those sacred duties to the very best of her ability. The domestic duties of womanhood are first regarded by Fénelon as an important social function, for which the monastic education was the worst preparation that could be imagined. There are not only children to be educated, but servants to be managed. The more deeply we enter into the spirit and full purport of Fénelon's contentions, the more it strikes us how he anticipates all the points of discussion which were to keep the philosophical moralists of the next century busy. A woman may excel in the art of being served ; she may show in her treatment of her inferiors that she realises the great truth

that all human beings in their widely different social stations are equal before God, and that any amount of authority involves an equal amount of responsibility. Ideas like the above seem to belong to the eighteenth century rather than to the seventeenth. Fénelon was in the full sense of the word : a pioneer.

We have said that the Jansenist educators held that "la composition du coeur de l'homme est mauvaise dès son enfance", directing their efforts towards reclamation from innate evil. Fénelon's views are more optimistic.

To him, there is no original tendency towards either good or evil. Everything depends upon guidance ; give a child a good education and all its possibilities for good will be developed and bear fruit. The sole aim of education is not social influence or intellectual culture, but merely what he calls "l'amour de la vertu". And who can be fitter for such a task than the girl's own mother ? "A good mother", says Fénelon, "is infinitely preferable to the best convent". Only she can prepare her daughter for the domestic circle over which it will one day be her task to preside, and only she has enough natural affection for her to impress upon her receptive mind lessons of moral wisdom. Boys, who are brought up to be citizens, require a public education, but for girls there is no place of education like the home, watched over by a loving mother.

A few of the points introduced may here be passed in rapid review. Great stress is laid on tenderness in education. Unless the pupil feels real affection for the teacher, unless the task of learning lessons is made a pleasant, and not a wearisome one, the results will be disappointing. Gentle reasoning and persuasion ought therefore as a rule to take the place of severity. Also in matters of religion an appeal should be made to the child's budding reason. The religious principles should be instilled in a subtle, slightly philosophical manner, and cleverly arranged questions — often in the form of metaphors or similes — should suggest to the pupil the expected replies. Here we have an anticipation of that "mise en scène" which becomes a striking feature in Rousseau.

A close study of the characters of women implies an insight into the essentially feminine failings, which may render them unfit for their task, and therefore ought to be first exposed and then carefully eradicated. Fénelon's list of female shortcomings and their remedies proves that there was no great difference in the matter of inclinations between the female youth of France and that of England.

Their worst vices are said to proceed from the misdirection of two characteristically feminine qualities : imagination and sensibility. Want of purpose renders the former over-active and turns it towards dangerous objects. A careful watch should be kept over the literature put into the hands of young females, for of the amorous romances then in vogue which were so eagerly devoured by the sex, the majority were far too stimulating to an imagination which in the close seclusion of home-or convent-life was but too apt to run riot. By living in an imaginary society of "précieux et précieuses" the girls became dissatisfied with everyday life and were made unfit for it.

Another dangerous consequence of inoccupation is that thirst for amusement which is the leading motive in female society. It creates egoists, bent upon indulging every wanton caprice. This, coupled with physical weakness, makes women resort to cunning and dissimulation as a means of attaining their end, to the detriment of their moral characters.

Vanity, which is another inherent portion of the female character, is responsible for that inordinate desire to please which in leading to an all-absorbing passion for clothes and fashion threatens to ruin domestic life and to deprave the female morals.

Fénelon had no patience with the "précieuses" of the decline, who tried to appear "savantes" without being even "instruites". To him, the value of knowledge depends entirely on its practical use as a means of edifying the mind and soul. Woman was not meant for science, and what Fénelon has seen of the "femme savante" is not calculated to make him enthusiastic. Girls should feel "une pudeur sur la science presque aussi délicate que celle qu'inspire l'horreur du vice." His programme of subjects of female study is correspondingly small. Reading and writing, spelling, arithmetic and grammar are the principal. In addition, music, painting, history, Latin and literature are conditionally recommended, for the individual talents have to be taken into consideration.

Fénelon's picture of contemporary womanhood is far from alluring. Its chief interest lies in the circumstance that it is the first instance in French literature of a systematic estimate of female manners based upon the feminine psychology, anticipating the current opinion among the writers of the next century regarding the foibles of the sex. Fénelon was among the first to realise — what Mary Wollstonecraft a century later stated with that characteristic frankness which

almost entirely robbed her of female sympathy — that the worst enemy of female emancipation is, and always has been, woman herself. As long as the majority of women make considerations of sex the foundation of all their actions, it will prove impossible for the champions of equality to accomplish their full aims. Although a churchman and a moralist, Fénelon was in open revolt against the spirit of monasticism which regarded only eternity and failed to see its relation to everyday life, with its many exigencies. The best preparation for eternity, according to him, is a daily attention to the nearest duties of life. Not science, but the domestic circle was the proper domain of woman. More necessary than theoretical knowledge was that practical instruction in the little household ways which turn a young woman into a good housekeeper. What Fénelon did not sufficiently realise, was the indispensable connection between a moral and an intellectual education. The theory that perfect virtue arises out of the intellect and derives its chief value from a rational source, was a further step in the same direction which it was left to his successors to take. But he was instrumental in preparing the enfranchisement of the female education from the narrow principles of that church to which he belonged heart and soul.

His precepts were almost immediately put in practice. Making some allowance for personal inclinations and circumstances which forbade their full application, we may call Madame de Maintenon the foremost pupil of Fénelon's school. This remarkable woman's educational views present two entirely different aspects. She was a pietist of the Roman Catholic faith, but with certain leanings towards liberalism which smacked of heresy, the origin of which may be found in the influence of the philosophical creeds with which her early career as a précieuse had brought her into contact. On the other hand, her experience of society — after her marriage to the poet Scarron she had for some years kept a salon in Paris — had given her a taste for literature and made her a believer in "l'art de dire et d'écrire" as one of the necessary elements of female education. She thus combined in her person two of the principal tendencies of the century : a strong religious spirit and an intense interest in literature, and both became important factors in her educational system, in which she aimed at reconciling the exigencies of the world with the demands of piety in forming society women who were devout Christians. She was a woman of practical common sense, actuated by the most unselfish motives, and devoted to the exercise of that

Reason which she held ought to be the constant regulator of Piety and the governing motive of all human actions. Nothing could be more directly opposed to the monastic spirit. Her principles therefore stamped her as a reactionary of Fénelon's school, save for the fact that "the world was too much with her", which made her always keep in view that polite society whose morals she had set out to improve, and the allurements of which constantly clashed with the rigidity of her religious devotion. At the same time the charms of domesticity appealed to her as strongly as to Fénelon. Reason, she argued, forbids the education of women to any station except that for which Providence originally intended them, and Providence never meant them to pass their lives in a convent, but rather in the domestic circle as devoted wives and loving mothers. She felt the monastic education to be a violation of the destination of womanhood, and her educational writings were a plea for emancipation from the compulsion of conventional religiosity with its disregard of practical life.

The equality-claim has no place in her programme. The very spirit of Christianity condemns it. "Dieu a soumis notre sexe au moment qu'il l'a créé, la faiblesse de notre esprit et de notre corps a besoin d'être conduite, soutenue et protégée ; notre ignorance nous rend incapable de décision, et nous ne pouvons dans l'ordre de Dieu, gouverner que dépendamment des hommes." No further steps towards intellectual, social or political enfranchisement are to be expected from Madame de Maintenon.

Although woman can only "govern dependently", yet her rule of the home — and here again she fully agrees with Fénelon — is of the utmost importance, not only to her own small circle, but to society, or rather to that portion of it which alone had her full regard and affection : the kingdom of France. Woman was meant for marriage and her education should be relative to her position in society. Plutarch's line of thought, which we had almost lost sight of, re-enters the stage with the appearance of Fénelon and Madame de Maintenon. No motives of false delicacy should withhold from young women such information as may be useful to them in their struggle against the temptations of the outside world. The right place to prepare them for their natural place in society is not the convent, but the college, where the educational taste is entrusted to capable teachers, of whom it may be said that "le monde n'est étranger qu'à leur coeur". The optimistic faith in the capability of her sex of being perfected, which links her to Helvétius and the other Encyclopedians

gave her the necessary courage to attempt an experiment which she confidently trusted might lead to a general reform in female morals. The words of Racine's *Esther :*

Ici, loin du tumulte, aux devoirs les plus saints
Tout un peuple naissant est formé par mes mains,

are a faithful reflection of her hope for the future. And so Madame de Maintenon declared war against convention and tradition and went the way she had marked out for herself. Her influence with the king enabled her to carry out her scheme to the minutest details and became the means of placing the vast establishment of St. Cyr at her disposal. The time had come to realise her dream of education. Two hundred and fifty girls of aristocratic families whom the endless wars had ruined, were entrusted to the care of a headmistress, Mme de Brinon, and her staff, under Madame de Maintenon's personal superintendance. It was her wish that they should constitute a large family and that the relation between teacher and pupil should be as nearly as possible that of mother to child, so as to make the reality differ as little as possible from what Fénelon's theory had considered the ideal form. The secular character of the establishment — on which the king had also insisted, holding that there were already more nuns than was strictly compatible with the interests of his kingdom — appeared from the fact that the teachers — "les dames de Saint Louis" — were called "madame" instead of "soeur" and wore dresses which, although simple, were different from those worn in the convent. They were not at first expected to take the vow for life, but their patroness expressed a distinct wish that they should always regard their pupils' interests before their own and show the greatest possible devotion to this task. In respect of this insistence upon the most absolute self-abnegation — involving a most unyielding sternness in taking what seemed the right moral course and a most complete subjection on the part of the pupil — Mme de Maintenon's ideas came dangerously near those of the Jansenists against whose severe methods she professed to be in revolt. The rules of discipline at St. Cyr were in some respects as strict as those practised at Port Royal and in both the motive was to shield the pupil against contamination. Realising the danger of influence from abroad at an age when the character was not sufficiently formed, and apt to take impressions too easily, Mme de Maintenon determined that all parental authority should cease. The girls were kept in the establishment until they were well out of their teens, and supposed to be

morally strong enough to resist temptation and to exercise influence on their surroundings instead of undergoing it. There were no holidays and the "demoiselles" were allowed to see their parents only four times a year for half an hour or so under the watchful eye of one of the mistresses. Even their correspondence with them was limited, and the tone of the letters had to be strictly formal, in fact they were mere exercises of style. Apart from these restrictions, the girls were treated with great kindness, if with little outward show of affection. Mme de Maintenon was too much devoted to Reason to approve of such demonstrations, and wished the emotions to be kept under strict control. On the other hand, punishments were few, the teacher took a liberal share in all recreations and amusements, and the necessary instruction was made as attractive and imparted in as unobtrusive a manner as possible, in accordance with Fénelon's precepts.

The sudden change in Mme de Maintenon's system of discipline which took place in the third year of St. Cyr and which narrowed down the comparative liberty which had been a fundamental principle to the absolute subjection described above, was a frank avowal of the failure of her original methods and at the same time a proof of the sincerity of her endeavour. It was due to a most unexpected development.

In the first years of St. Cyr — the establishment was opened in 1686 — the study of literature had occupied an important place among the subjects of the curriculum. The girls were made to act little domestic scenes written by the headmistress. At the patroness's instigation an experiment was made with Racine's "*Andromaque*", which, in her opinion, "succeeded too well", for the girls so entered into the spirit of the play, and developed such histrionic talents, that their monitress, realising the danger, asked Racine to write another play specially for them. In accordance with this request the great dramatist wrote "*Esther*", which was performed several times before the king and a select audience with signal success, and results disastrous to the spirit prevailing among the girls of St. Cyr. Never before had the discipline of the institution been in greater jeopardy. The girls' heads were turned, and their vanity and conceit knew no bounds.

Mme de Maintenon saw that energetic measures were urgently called for, and did not hesitate to adopt them. With an earnestness and resolution greatly to her credit she undertook the necessary reform with the effect of radically removing whatever was liberal and reac-

tionary in her system, and reducing St. Cyr to a slightly modified form of a convent, thus granting to her opponents the satisfaction of a great moral victory, which the latter deserved no more than Mme de Maintenon deserved her defeat.

One of the unfortunate consequences was that the instruction which the girls received, and which had never been abundant, was reduced to almost a minimum. "Il n'est point question de leur orner l'esprit", said Mme de Maintenon. The horrors of exaggerated preciosity were ever since before her eyes. Too much learning, she feared, might turn the girls into précieuses, and manual labour was introduced as an effective antidote. Fortunately the years tended to soften the severity which had prevailed immediately after the catastrophe, and upon the whole the institution, which enjoyed special protection and undiminished popularity until its suppression by the Convention in 1793, could boast excellent results, and turned out some real "ornaments of their sex".

It seems a pity that in Mme de Maintenon's schemes so secondary a place should have been given to that education of the mind which is so essential to lasting improvement. She inevitably suffers by comparison with her contemporary Mme de Sévigné, whose correspondence with her daughter Mme de Grignan contains a most enlightened scheme for the education of her granddaughter Pauline de Simiane. She recognises that it is by literature that the mind is fed, and since to the pure everything is pure, there is little to be feared even of the otherwise pernicious reading of novels, for a sound mind will not easily go astray. An optimistic view of education, taking its root in considerations of philosophy, for Mme de Sévigné, like her daughter, was a Cartesian. In comparing her contribution to the educational problem with that of Mme de Maintenon, it should be remembered, however, that an individual education within the family circle offers better opportunities for freedom and less danger of contamination than the collective system of St. Cyr. Mme de Sévigné's ideas, contained in private correspondence, intended only for her daughter's use and entirely without the militant spirit, exercised little influence and were of little direct value to the cause of feminism.

## CHAPTER III.

### *The Position of French Women in Eighteenth Century Society.*

In the earlier half of the eighteenth century, at a time when the inferiority of English women was so generally recognised as to leave no room at all for controversy, the Woman Question was attracting a good deal of notice in France, and scarcely a year passed without some kind of contribution to its literature. [1]) It was by this time

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1) The "*Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*" (Tome XXIII, XXIV and XXV) contains a contribution by M. Raymond Toinet entitled: "Les Ecrivains moralistes au 17ième siecle"; being an alphabetical nomenclature of moral writings published during the age of Louis the Fourteenth (1638—1715). In this list works of a feminist or an anti-feminist nature figure so largely that little doubt can be entertained as to the interest taken in the topic under discussion. They may be conveniently classified as follows:

1. *Assertions of female superiority*, including a. o. two French translations of Agrippa, three pieces entitled: "*Le Triomphe des Dames*," and one by Mlle. Jacquette Guillaume, entitled: "*Les Dames Illustres*". They were frequently combined with attacks on the male half of humanity, as in the case of Regnard's "*Satire contre les Maris*".
2. *Apologies for the female sex*, including Perrault's "*Apologie des Femmes*", Poullain de la Barre's "*Egalité des deux Sexes*", and a Latin translation of Anna Maria Schuurman. Some were meant as a refutation of some male attack. To this class belong Ninon de l'Enclos' "*Coquette Vengée*" and a number of replies to Boileau's satire.
3. *Attacks on the female sex*, which are gradually diminishing in number, or rather changing from the direct invective to the moral essay with a didactic purpose, busying itself with the female morals and the female character. A collection of pieces dealing with the problem of sexual preference was published in 1698 by de Vertron under the name of "*La nouvelle Pandore, ou les femmes illustres du siècle de Louis le Grand*".
4. *Rules of female conduct*, for the use of young ladies "about to enter the world", insisting chiefly on the feminine duty of preserving the reputation. A translation of Lord Halifax's "*Advice*" (see page 83), "*Heroines ou conseils d'un homme de qualité a sa fille*" seems to have attracted some notice.
5. *Pieces dealing with the relations between the sexes in daily intercourse*, including the subjects of love and gallantry, and of marriage. Some are directly favourable to the state of matrimony, pointing to the reciprocal duties of the partners in the contract, and instructing them in the readiest way to happiness; others, frequently deriving their inspiration from Boileau, arguing about marriage as a social institution and enumerating its advantages and its drawbacks. To the period under discussion belongs a translation of Erasmus' "*Christian Marriage*".
6. *Treatises of female education*, containing a plea for the development of the female intellect. They are, as yet, remarkably few. Beyond the contributions by Poullain de la Barre and Fenelon there are some half-dozen pieces dealing with the education of girls on a religious basis, and a few in which the question of the pursuit of science and philosophy by women is stated and answered favourably. There was an "*Apologie de la science des Dames, par Clorise*." (1662); a treatise entitled: "*Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie et particulièrement de la morale*", (1667); another by René Bary bearing the somewhat questionable title of "*La fine philosophie accommodée à l'intelligence des dames*", and, in conclusion, one by Guillaume Colletet, headed: "*Question curieuse, s'il est nécessaire ou non que les filles sçavent escrire, agréé de tout le monde et d'autre par Mlle Anne Marie de Schuremann, hollandoise, et André Rivet, précepteur, le tout mis en françois par le sieur Colletet*" (1646).

an acknowledged problem, and theoretically speaking it may be said that by the middle of the century feminism in France had carried the day, thanks mainly to the influence of modern philosophy, which the salons helped in propagating. The instruction-problem was also settled in theory in a manner satisfactory to feminists, and only that of female occupations remained as yet unbroached. The position of women in society not only became a favourite topic of conversation and controversy, but came to command a number of able pens in periodical literature and in the drama. In the latter branch of literature a number of pieces were written on the subject, some of which were hostile and sought the aid of ridicule, but of which the majority were of a more sympathetic tendency, showing that Molière's attack had failed. All the important theatres paid their tribute of attention to the cause of feminism. One of the earliest was Montchenay's "*Cause des Femmes*", a comedy performed at the Théâtre italien as early as 1687, while a more elaborate dramatic statement of the cause, entitled "*l'Ile des Amazones*" was composed in 1718 by Lesage and d'Orneval, and suggested the machinery of the "*Amazones Modernes*" of Legrand (1727), performed at the Théâtre français. This brings us to the field of Utopian literature *à la* Mrs. Manley, whose "*New Atlantis*" had appeared a few years previously. The Amazons, who had founded their own community in a remote island, having forsworn the society of men, made their return conditional on the acceptance of the following terms :

1stly, there was to be no subordination of the wife to the husband ;

2ndly, the women were to be allowed to study, and to have their own universities ;

3rdly, they were to be eligible to the highest positions in the army as in jurisdiction and finance ; and finally it was to be considered as shameful an act on the part of a man to break the conjugal faith as on that of a woman, so that men might no longer boast of that which in a woman was deemed criminal. That the last was among the most rankling sores will be seen later on, when the "dual standard of morality" aroused the indignation of true "Blues" like Mrs. Chapone, and equally of radical feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft.

But the piece in which the question was best and most conclusively treated was a comedy, entitled "*La Colonie*", which Marivaux wrote about the middle of the century, and which, possibly owing to lack of success, was not included in the different editions of his works,

so that it is at present accessible only in the *Mercure de France* of 1750[1]). It was on the whole sympathetic to women, in spite of the failure of their effort – described in the play – to establish a feminine republic, and the pleasantries of which men and women alike are the object. Both the weak points of the female character, as vanity, coquetry, garrulity and frivolity, and those of the men, as envy and vainglory, are made the object of ridicule. But the feminist tendency of the whole appears from the fact that the speeches of the female leaders are more reasonable than those of the males who are worsted by them. The women of the island-state, bent upon vindicating their rights, and inflamed by the speeches of Arthenice and Madame Sorbin, — whose respective lover and husband occupy responsible positions on the male side — contemplate a final breach between the sexes. They experience their first disappointment when the young and pretty women refuse to give up their empire of coquetry, especially when told to make themselves ugly ! An ultimatum is duly sent to the male leaders, demanding the admission of women to different occupations and equality between the sexes in matrimonial affairs, a refusal of which will mean instant dissolution of the social state. When the men, driven to despair, are on the point of surrendering, a philosopher's stratagem brings relief. Rumours are spread of a hostile attack upon the island, and the women, by virtue of the proposed compact, are called upon to swell the ranks of the defending army. This proves too much for the majority, who find that they prefer the worries of the daily household routine to the hardships of war, causing peace to be restored.

The periodical essay was also made subservient to the propagation of feminist ideas when in 1750, while in London, Mme Leprince de Beaumont started the "*Nouveau Magasin français*", in which the rights of women were vindicated with great fervour. Nine years later, a second, even more pronounced attempt to adapt the periodical to the female interests was made in the "*Bibliothèque des Femmes*", which after a short run, was continued in the "*Journal des Dames*". This paper, which enjoyed great success, was continued for twenty years, during which it served the female interests and contained a number of articles written by women. The original intention of having only female contributors proved incapable of realisation. The paper sang the praises

1) "*La Nouvelle Colonie, ou la Ligue des Femmes*", first presented in the Théâtre italien on the 18th of April 1729, a three-act comedy, afterwards reduced to one single act to be performed in the "théâtres de société", and published in this form in the *Mercure*. (Cf. Larroumet; *Marivaux, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres*, Paris 1882).

of women in different keys, as an antidote to the daily revilings in other periodicals, and the original idea of promoting the female interests by stimulating the female intellect was gradually lost sight of.

But the greatest friends of woman and her cause, who fought and won her battles for her, and were willing to recognise her empire, were the philosophers of the Encyclopedia, with the emphatic exception of that most inconsistent of all geniuses: J. J. Rousseau. The Encyclopedian spirit is best reflected by d'Alembert's "*Lettre à J. J. Rousseau*", written in reply to the "*Lettre sur les Spectacles*" in the famous controversy on the drama. He protests against the latter's cynical views of womanhood. The human race would be indeed in a pitiable condition, he says, if the worthiest object of the male homage were indeed so rare an occurrence as Rousseau chooses to intimate. But supposing he should be right, to what cause would such a deplorable state of things be attributable? "L'esclavage et l'espèce d'avilissement où nous avons mis les femmes; les entraves que nous donnons à leur esprit et à leur âme, le jargon futile et humiliant pour elles et nous; auquel nous avons réduit notre commerce avec elles, comme si elles n'avaient pas une raison à cultiver, ou n'en étaient pas dignes; enfin, l'éducation funeste, je dirai presque meurtrière, que nous leur prescrivons, sans leur permettre d'en avoir d'autre; éducation ou elles apprennent presque uniquement à se contrefaire sans cesse, à n'avoir pas un sentiment qu'elles n'étouffent, une opinion qu'elles ne cachent, une pensée qu'elles ne déguisent. Nous traitons la nature en elles comme dans nos jardins, nous cherchons à l'orner en l'étouffant." And d'Alembert makes an appeal to the philosophers of the age to destroy so pernicious a prejudice, to shake off the barbarous yoke of custom and to set the example by giving their daughters the same education as their sons, that they may be saved from idleness and the evils that follow inevitably in its train. And the cause of woman thus became incorporated in the great scheme of Liberty and Equality which was slowly maturing in the master minds of the nation.

The gulf that yawned between the two opposing parties was widening every instant. One one side were those in possession of power and authority, leaning upon Custom and Tradition, drawing what inspiration animated them from the source of the Ancients and stubbornly opposing any change which might tend to undermine their position. Ranged on the other was the intellect of the nation, the devotees of a philosophy which held the promise of the millennium to be almost within immediate reach, firing the mind with their daring

schemes for improvement and asserting the coming triumph of Modernism. Nothing could be more natural than that woman should throw in her lot with the latter and that her cause should become a subdivision of the great problem of humanity. The great sphere of activity, next to the wide field of literature, was the more modest compass of the eighteenth century salon.

Madame de Lambert herself draws a parallel somewhere between the salons of the seventeenth and those of the eighteenth century, more especially with regard to the prevailing codes of morality. Her conclusions, like those of M. Brunetière nearly two centuries later, are overwhelmingly in favour of Mme de Rambouillet and her contemporaries. She complains that the delicate intellectual amusements of the seventeenth century assemblies have been largely superseded by the grosser delights of the card-table and of a declining stage. The merest semblance of knowledge is regarded with disapproval, — this in consequence of Molière's furious onslaught in his *Femmes Savantes* — and as a natural consequence of ignorance, the female morals have sadly decayed. Being thus deprived of the means of improving the mind, women are naturally driven to a life of pleasure-seeking. And she doubts whether society has derived any benefit from the change. "Les femmes ont mis la débauche à la place du savoir, le précieux qu'on leur a tant reproché, elles l'ont changé en indécence." In other words, Mme de Lambert wanted to return to the earlier preciosity, granting women the right to be instructed, and trying to steer clear of those excesses which had called forth the attacks of Molière and Boileau. She emphatically protests against the pernicious habit of making a pleasing appearance the sole aim of female education, and claims for her sex the blessings of an education which in cultivating the mind will improve the female morals.

It would be impossible to deny that the moral standard was considerably lower than it had been half a century earlier. The consequences entailed by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and by the suppression of Port Royal had been equally disastrous. The chief bulwarks of Protestant and Catholic orthodox faith had been removed, leaving a free field to both libertinage and disbelief. The coarseness of manners which it had been the aim of the Rambouillet societies to suppress reasserted itself on the one hand, while on the other the rising spirit of philosophical inquiry and scientific research had degenerated into a scepticism which was no longer counteracted by that spirit of religious mysticism which had been a weapon of orthodoxy against unbe-

lief. The Encyclopedian spirit often spelt deism and atheism, both of which flourished in the salons. The very fact that their society was no longer exclusive, but freely admitted people of alle class and opinions, and from different parts of the world, accounts for the enormous influence exercised by these "bureaux d'esprit" upon public opinion in the eighteenth century. Moreover, the monarchical power was declining, and the king, in establishing a barrier between himself and the society of the salons, was himself instrumental in raising opinions which more and more became the prevailing ones, and upon which he had no influence whatever. Rationalism began to gain ground rapidly and became a basis for speculations which soon came to include politics and economics.

M. Brunetière, whose judgment on the salons of the eighteenth century is very severe, complains that the lofty artistic and moral ideals of the preceding generation had given way to scepticism and to cynicism of a kind which made Madame de Tencin refer to her guests as "ses bêtes". This statement, which no doubt is mainly correct, seems strange in consideration of the fact that it was by the new philosophy which the same salons helped in spreading, that the great problems of the future of the human race were put forward, which in broader minds gave rise to much idealism in what M. du Bled so finely calls: "le souci de la modernité." But eighteenth century society regarded philosophy as an intellectual pastime rather than as bringing the hope of relief to the oppressed millions, and if it occasionally dabbled in social problems, the misery of the multitude did not touch the majority of those who lived lives of comfort and luxury, and were utterly unacquainted with suffering, very deeply. No direct attempt at improvement, therefore, was to be expected from them, they were talking in theory about things of the practice of which they knew nothing. Brunetière calls the eighteenth century salon "le triomphe de l'universelle incompétence", with which its seventeenth century predecessor, with its more limited programme, compares favourably. It became habitual "to talk wittily of serious problems, while seriously discussing trifling subjects". It needed, indeed, the fiery imagination and fervent enthusiasm of a Rousseau to inspire the philosophical theories with the life of his genius. And yet, if the social problems of the time were not directly solved by eighteenth century society, they were at least formulated by it in such a manner as to make them the catchword of the period and to draw to them the attention of those who were better able to do them

justice. The very fact that the salons were ruled over by women and independent of court-influence made them the place where opinions were most freely uttered and most readily listened to.

Literature, which had been the chief occupation of the early salons, now found a powerful rival in science. The poetry of the eighteenth century "ruelles" became of an even lighter and more insipid kind. On the other hand, the latter half of the previous century had witnessed a growing interest in anatomy and surgery, and after the introduction (by Fontenelle) of astronomy as a fashionable science, Newton became the rage, and ladies of quality like the marquise du Châtelet were among his worshippers. The domination of the salons thus became extended to philosophy, science, economics and politics. When the Ancient and Modern controversy was re-introduced in the opening years of the century, nearly all the female philosophers were fervent partisans of the Moderns, believing in a future in which all human beings would be guided by the light of Reason.

Of this eighteenth century modernism, feminism is, in fact, only a subdivision. This appears from the work of Poullain de la Barre, and still more from the great defence of the Cause of Woman (when threatened by Boileau in Satire X "*Sur les Femmes*") by the great champion of modernism Perrault in his "*Apologie des Femmes.*" The Moderns, indeed, saw in the prejudice against women a remnant of the servility of antiquity which was in flagrant contradiction with the dictates of Reason. Hence the close connection between feminist literature in the eighteenth century and life in the salons, of which the authors were mostly among the regular frequenters. The marquise de Lambert laid down her ideas of feminism in her "*Réflexions sur les Femmes*", and we have seen that both D'Alembert and Marivaux were among the staunch defenders of the right of the sex to equal consideration.

Boileau's death had left the "précieuses" in the undisputed possession of the field of light literature, to which now became added that of science. This new form of preciosity, "la préciosité scientifique", which made its appearance in the salon of Mme de Lambert, where it found an ardent worshipper in Fontenelle, grew so powerful that even Voltaire's efforts to crush it with ridicule were unavailing. So strong had the female dictatorship become, that three of the most influential men-of-letters in the kingdom had vainly tried to get the better of it. But unfortunately the platonic ideal to which the women of the preceding century had owed their ascendancy had degenerated,

and in consequence of the altered circumstances women often had to buy with physical submission and degradation that worship of their beauty and deference to their opinion which made them at the same time the rulers and the slaves of men, and against which the moralists of the century, with the glaring exception of Rousseau, made it their business to protest loudly, but in vain.

Mme de Lambert merely wanted to restore the right sort of preciosity to its throne as an antidote to the evils of ignorance, in which she set herself the ideals of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and advocated moderation in everything. Her salon thus became as much a protest against exaggeration and affectation as against the prevailing opinion that the education of women should only aim at teaching them how to please the opposite sex. An occasional frequenter calls it "l'hôtel de Rambouillet présidé par Fontenelle, et où les précieuses corrigées se souvenaient de Molière."

Being left a widow at a comparatively early age, Mme de Lambert opened her salon in the Palais Mazarin in the rue Colbert about 1700. She was at that time rather more than fifty, and reigned supreme over her circle of visitors for more than thirty years. She set herself to prove that it was possible to have a lively entertainment without the help of the card-table, relying chiefly on conversation and literature. Her Tuesdays and Wednesdays soon became famous, and attracted both the aristocracy and the literati. Among her regular visitors were Fontenelle, Marivaux, Mlle de Launay (Mme de Staal) and de la Motte, champion of the moderns, whilst Mme Dacier undertook the defence of the opposite cause. Mme de Lambert herself was the ruling spirit of the Académie, of which the way towards membership lay through her favour, and the chief literary productions previous to being published — if published they were — were read and criticised in her circle.

If Mme de Lambert deserves mention for having kept a salon which formed a link between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, and exercised a beneficial influence on the tone of conversation, she is even more entitled to attention on account of the part played by her in the development of feminism. She was a moralist rather than educator, and followed in the steps of Fénelon. She had the Cartesian belief in the infallibility of Reason, with two exceptions, which do honour to the qualities of her heart, and saved her from the inevitable conclusions of logic *à outrance* : religion and honour. "Il y a deux préjugés auxquels il faut obéir : la religion et l'honneur",

and a little further : "En fait de religion, il faut céder aux autorités. Sur tout autre sujet, il ne faut recevoir que celle de la raison et de l'évidence", excluding even honour. But her actions show that she realised the danger which lies in obeying the duties of reason while totally excluding the admonitions of the heart. Stronger than her love of logic was that exquisite form of sensibility which made her at least a real champion of the less fortunately situated. There is real concern for the welfare of her inferiors in the precept that "servants should be treated as unhappy friends", and a true love of humanity in the statement that "humanity suffers in consequence of the inequality which Fortune has introduced among men". Words which come from the heart and entitle her to sympathy and admiration.

Her ideas concerning female education are contained in the "*Avis d'une mère à sa fille*". She insists on the importance of cultivating the female mind to render woman an agreeable companion to her husband, who will then honour her and give her her due. And she places herself on the standpoint which Mary Wollstonecraft took after her, in basing upon this foundation her vindication of women's *right* to be instructed. She complains of the tyranny of men, who condemn to ignorance the partners of their wedded lives, disregarding the pernicious consequences entailed thereby. For ignorance leads to vice, and the mind should be kept employed, were it only as a means of avoiding mischief. To Mme de Lambert the Muses were "l'asyle des moeurs". Her educational scheme contains more instruction than Fénelon's, as it includes philosophy, which is to reclaim women to virtue through the medium of Reason.

Of all the French female authors on the Woman Question it is Mme de Lambert whose ideas show the nearest approach to Mary Wollstonecraft. The essential difference between the two — the former's indifference to political emancipation — was due to a difference in social circumstances, which made her a ruler whose influence over men no political enfranchisement could have increased, and also to the condition of things in France, where the first steps towards the political equality of the stronger sex were yet to be taken. She believed the domestic circle to be the proper sphere of women, and her "metaphysics" of love — if less fantastic than the ideals of her 17th century predecessors, which, however, found some adherents among the regulars of her own circle in de la Motte and the Duchesse du Maine — were certainly more conducive to real happiness in the

high moral principles out of which they arose. It was the marquis d'Argenson who said of her writings that they were "un résumé complet de la morale du monde et du temps présent la plus parfaite", and there seems no reason to doubt the truth of his judgment.

Unfortunately the good example set by the marquise de Lambert was not followed in other circles, where the increasing influence of the feminine element, instead of purifying the morals of the male sex, depraved them yet further. The great catastrophe of the end of the century was hastened by the vicious excesses of many females. Goncourt says that the eighteenth century lady of quality represented the principle that governed society, the reason which directed it and the voice which commanded it ; she was, in fact, "la cause universelle et fatale, l'origine des événements, la source des choses," and nothing could be achieved without her concurrence. Rousseau, when first arriving in Paris, was advised by a Jesuit to cultivate the acquaintance of women, "for nothing ever happened in Paris except through them".

The bulk of female influence upon the morals of the century was disastrous. The gross materialism amongst society-women found expression in a well-known utterance of the marquise du Châtelet : "We are here merely to procure ourselves the greatest possible variety of agreeable sensations." The most perverse code of morality came to reign in some of the most-frequented salons. One of the leading hostesses of Paris boasted that one of her reception-days was reserved for "gentlemen of a damaged reputation", the so-called "jour des coquins". Of the Englishmen who frequented these circles of appalling vice, Horace Walpole — who in a space of forty years paid six successive visits to Paris, and who was very far indeed from being a sentimentalist, — refers to the utter absence of any sense of decency among people whose chief occupation was the demolition of all authority, whether temporal or spiritual, including the Divine Authority itself.

One of the worst examples of the epicurian spirit was furnished by the salon of the notorious Mme de Tencin. She disdained even to keep up the appearance of quasi-platonic courtship and lived in open and shameless debauch. Her entire life was made up of political intrigues and adventures of gallantry, in which she turned the latter to account to promote the former. She possessed plenty of literary talent, and her two novels "*Le Comte de Comminges*" and "*Le siège de Calais*" rank among the best female productions of the century —

but even Fontenelle thought her heartless. After a childhood spent in the very imperfect seclusion of a convent which was notorious for its nocturnal orgies, "la religieuse Tencin" came to Paris in 1712 to begin her siege of male hearts, directing her first attack against no less a person than the Regent himself, and ultimately contenting herself with one of his ministers, which gallant adventure was followed by many more. She gave birth to a child, whom she deposited on the steps of a church, to be found and brought up by strangers. This child afterwards became the famous d'Alembert.

In order to be able to pursue her political schemes she filled her salon on different days of the week with people of various occupations and interests; keeping philosophers and académiciens, politicians and ecclesiastics carefully separated, making herself their confidante, and possessing herself of their secrets, managing them all so cleverly that they became her tools without being aware of it, secretly despising her "bêtes" while openly flattering them. The visitors to her two weekly dinners were nearly all men, Bolingbroke and Matthew Prior being among her "habitués". Apart from Mme Geoffrin, who became her successor, and of whom she said that "she only came to see of there was anything among her inventory that she might have a use for", there were hardly any women, for Mme de Tencin would brook no possible rivals. Such was her degradation that she wrote a most indecent "*Chronique scandaleuse*" for the special delectation of the Regent. As Mme de Lambert's salon represents eighteenth century society at its best, so Mme de Tencin's foreshadowed some of the worst instances of female intriguing that were to follow.

A totally different salon was that kept by Mme Geoffrin. Mme de Tencin — whose own birth was not above suspicion — had all the pride of class, and looked down upon the Third Estate; Mme Geoffrin on the contrary was the daughter of a court-valet and consequently remained all her life a "bourgeoise", without any pretence to "préciosité" or anything but a kind and warm heart, a most remarkable wit, sound common sense and a natural delicacy which made her an ideal hostess. For Mme de Tencin's lofty disdain she substituted an almost maternal solicitude for the welfare of her "children", who, with the exception of Mlle de Lespinasse, were of the male sex. Besides d'Alembert, Diderot, Morellet and Grimm there were the ubiquitous Horace Walpole, David Hume the philosopher and Wraxall; the first-named of whom in his correspondence declared

her to be "a most extraordinary woman with more common sense than he had ever encountered in one of her sex."

The principles of the salon in the Rue St. Honoré were much the same as at Mme de Tencin's, but a milder spirit prevailed, and the demon of intrigue was absent. Mme Geoffrin kept fixed reception-days, her Mondays being devoted to artists, and her Wednesdays to men-of-letters and philosophers, while her intimates were made welcome on both days. The hostess presided over the assemblies without in any way obtruding her personal opinions or bringing her private interests into play, exercising an absolute authority which never became tyranny, and keeping peace among the more excitable of her guests [1]). She was much appreciated by them all, not least by the future king of Poland, Stanislas Augustus, her devoted "son", causing Walpole to refer to her as "the queen-mother of Poland". Her apotheosis came when in her sixty-eighth year she visited Warsaw, where she met with a royal reception. After her return her mental powers declined rapidly, and her daughter — fearing the influence of scepticism upon her mother — kept her favourite philosophers at a distance, eliciting from her the remark that she was, like Godfrey of Bouillon, "protecting her tomb against the infidels."

The third of the "Muses of the philosophical Decameron", whose salon was much in vogue, was Julie de Lespinasse, whose attractive personality and brilliant conversational and epistolary powers account for her success. She combined the warmth of heart of Mme Geoffrin with the ardent temperament of Mme de Tencin, but without the latter's brazen-facedness. She possessed a degree of sensibility which made her succumb to different lovers "for each of whom she cherished a passion which it was beyond her power to resist." Her youth had been fed with Richardson, "*Clarissa Harlowe*" being her favourite. She had entered the employ of the famous marquise du Deffand, herself a prominent hostess, in the capacity of reader. Her wit and the natural buoyancy of her character soon made her more popular than her mistress, whose guests took to visiting her in her room, while her mistress was still asleep. Mme du Deffand in her jealousy accused her of "skimming off the cream of her visitors' conversation"; a breach followed, and Julie was enabled by some

1) Such, at least, is the description of Mme Geoffrin's character in M. E. Pilon's "*Portraits français*". M. G. Lanson, in his "*Lettres du dix-huitième siècle*", accuses her of vanity and consequent despotic leanings. "Elle aimait à conseiller ses amis, et les régentait en mère un peu despotique: elle n'aimait pas les indépendants, les âmes indociles et fières qui ne se laissent pas proteger, et veulent être consultés dans le bien qu'on leur fait".

supporters to set up a small salon in the rue St. Dominique, which flourished from 1764 till the year of her death in 1776. She could not afford sumptuous dinners, but her guests were sure of a warm welcome and of some interesting conversation, which she conducted so tactfully, effacing herself completely and making her guests feel at home by always appearing interested, that her lack of personal beauty was quite forgotten in the charm of her manner. Politics were a frequent topic, and Mlle de Lespinasse was among the professed admirers of the British Constitution. D'Alembert, Condorcet, Turgot and also Mme Geoffrin belonged to her circle, and that Walpole knew her also, appears from the correspondence between him and Mme du Deffand, who at Julie's death complained that the rupture with her had robbed her of the friendship of d'Alembert.

While the women of society were celebrating their triumphs in the salons, philosophy was trying to do something for the female multitude. We have seen that it was Fénelon who caused education to be included among the subjects of moral philosophy, but it was the diffusive power of Rousseau's writings that made it one of the most frequently discussed themes of the century. His "*Emile, ou de l'Education*", which appeared in 1762 — curiously enough, the year of the suppression of Jesuitism in France — marked a new era in the history of education, if not in that of feminism. Of Rousseau it might have been reasonably expected as the champion of liberty and equality to carry to their full extent the philosophical venturings of Fénelon and thus to usher in a new era of female emancipation. However, with an inconsistency which is one of his chief characteristics, Rousseau not only deliberately left the female half of mankind out of his scheme for political enfranchisement, but ranged himself among the anti-feminists by the great emphasis he laid on the consideration of a sexual character, which he construed into evidence of female inferiority, by arguing that it makes the subjection of woman a natural law, which is to be respected according to the theory that "whatever is in Nature, must be right." Owing to the contradictory nature of his views, however, while directly opposing the movement, he indirectly furthered it in two ways. In the first place, his social theories were adopted without reserve and without restrictions by some of his followers, who thus repaired the omission which had left Woman out of the scheme; and secondly it was Rousseau who once for all broke the back of the monastic system of education by continuing the campaign which Fénelon in theory, and Mme de Maintenon in practice, had entered upon

before him, and bringing it to a happy conclusion. The reduction and ultimate abolition of the education of religion, which was one of the great victories of the philosophical school, became manifest in the latter half of the century. It was a signal success, achieved over an unwilling government and crowned by the expulsion of the Jesuits, who had formed one of the chief bulwarks against the growing revolutionary spirit.

The Cartesian principles, which had been a beacon-light to seventeenth century philosophy, were supplemented in the next by a new element : that of *utility*. In John Locke's "*Treatises of Government*" and also in "*Some Thoughts concerning Education*", he let himself be guided chiefly by considerations of usefulness, thus becoming the founder of that doctrine of Utilitarianism which, after influencing the French Encyclopedians, was to return to England a century later and to find a fervent champion in William Godwin. In deciding upon a course of action, the inevitable question was : "What is the use ?" and this guiding principle became paramount also in matters of education. To Locke, who was a man of practical sense and not a mere theorist, the problem was how to make people understand their real interests, and to make them act in accordance with them, which must necessarily lead to happiness. His educational system, therefore, is based upon the communication of such useful knowledge as will most contribute to the total amount of happiness to be found on this globe [1]). Locke insisted on the necessity for a physical education which increases the mental and moral capacity by rendering the body less subject to fatigue. Simplicity and effectiveness in dress and food, and plenty of outdoor exercise are recommended, and in this important matter, as indeed in a great many others, Locke may be said to have struck the keynote of the philosophical tendencies of the eighteenth century, anticipating the famous Nature-theory of Rousseau. Many important questions were mooted by him. He introduced the ethical problem of reward and punishment, and discussed the advisability of reasoning with a child and of making him learn a trade, which became a part of the educational programme of the next generations.

The French philosophers became Locke's immediate heirs, and

1) That a great many of the Utilitarian ideas of John Locke may be traced to their origin in the works of Montaigne has been demonstrated by M. Pierre Villey in his "*L'influence de Montaigne sur les Idées pédagogiques de Locke et de Rousseau*", who thus claims for the literature of his own country an honour which was commonly granted to that of England.

afterwards repaid their debt to England with interest. Where Locke gave his "young gentleman" a tutor, his views were adopted by the opponents of the monastic education. It could hardly be expected of Locke, who lived in a time when the female fortunes in his own country were at a very low ebb, to have paid much attention to the possibility of making women share in the obvious advantages of the new system. However, if he did little or nothing for British women, his theories were turned to account for the benefit of their French sisters, whose position in the lower walks of life was not very much better than theirs. His French disciples, carrying the theory of utility to its fullest extent, included the female sex in their reflections. The first in point of time was the Abbé de St. Pierre, of whom Rousseau contemptuously said that he was "a man of great schemes and narrow views". Seen from a feminist standpoint this judgment is cruelly unjust. For, even granting that the Abbé's schemes were too Utopian to be capable of full realisation — a circumstance he himself sadly recognised — the fact remains that he was responsible for the first project of female education *on a national basis*, making wholesale education a state-concern and thus wanting to extend the benefit of instruction to many who would otherwise be deprived of it. He stands at the beginning of the lane that leads via Bernardin de St. Pierre and Talleyrand to the great Condorcet.

The abbé de St. Pierre was willing to grant women *as a class* that equality which the better-class women had actually attained, and he believed in their instruction, holding that on the instruction given to the young, whether male or female, depended the happiness of the coming race. But he believed still more in the necessity for a moral education, for his utilitarianism is not of this earth, but of eternity. With him the ever recurring question is: "What will it profit the soul?", and the fear of punishment in Hell is rather stronger with him than the sense of moral duty. He thus laid himself open to attack from the notorious Mme de Puysieux, who believed in reputation and the preservation of appearances, informing him that it was silly to let the fear of Hell withhold people from seeking happiness by cultivating the good opinion of others, *whether deserved or not!* The final clause sums up what moralists found most objectionable in the inclinations of a depraved age.

The real aim of women, according to the Abbé, should be to please God, and not men, so as to gain eternal life. He has no ambition for women beyond that of making them devout Christians and

good housekeepers, and his educational efforts are accordingly directed towards these two accomplishments. Girls are to dress simply, to eschew cards — that curse of the age — and to learn useful needlework, the keeping of accounts and in general such things as will be of the greatest use to them in the performance of their domestic duties. But he very unaccountably refuses their youth the advantages and innocent enjoyments of home-life, wishing them to be brought up in colleges, in which they are to be kept immured until such time as their education will be completed, when they will be ready for matrimony! At college girls may learn to be good citizenesses, but they will scarcely gain the necessary experience for managing a home of their own. The comprehensiveness of his scheme, however, and his recognition of the female equality entitles him to a place in the history of feminism above Rousseau.

The latter's attitude towards the feminist movement is so complicated as to demand careful analysis. Where women were concerned the strong individuality of the female genius would not allow him to side fully either with "those who wished to condemn them to a life of household-drudgery, making of them a sort of superior slaves, or those who, not satisfied to vindicate woman's rights, made her usurp those of the stronger sex", for the former have too low a notion of the duties of womanhood, whilst the latter overlook the considerations of a sexual character by which, according to Rousseau, the relations between the sexes are exclusively determined. Rousseau's opinion of the depth to which women had sunk appears from his "*Lettre à d'Alembert sur les Spectacles*," which contains a fierce onslaught upon their moral perversity, which has caused the drama, too feeble to rise to worthier themes, to fall back upon erotics of a most despicable kind. Rousseau judged women capable of becoming something better than what eighteenth century society had made of them, but in his demands for them and in his schemes for perfecting their moral education he was extremely modest. Next to the salons he held the education of the convents, "ces véritables écoles de coquetterie", to be chiefly responsible for the degradation of the female character. The young women who, on leaving them, enter society, carry into instant practice the lessons of vanity and coquetry which the convents have supplied. For convent and salon Rousseau wanted to substitute the blessings of true domesticity — painted in glowing colours in the pages of the "*Nouvelle Héloise.*" His sympathies went out, not to that college-life of which the Abbé de St. Pierre had

such sanguine expectations, but to the intimacies of the family-circle, presided over by loving parents, an ideal which he reintroduced in the fifth book of his treatise on education, where, circumstances rendering it advisable to provide the finished male product with a suitable partner for life, the principles of Sophie's education are elaborately described [1]).

Where he recommends making the duties of life as pleasant as possible to the young pupil, protesting against that austere conception which allowed her no other diversion than studies and prayers, Rousseau sides with Fénelon. In his opinion girls enjoy too little freedom, whilst grown-up women are left too much liberty. Let the young girls have an opportunity to enjoy life, he says, or they will take it when they are older. Nor does the notion of making them at an early age acquainted with the world inspire him with terror, for he trusts with Mme de Sévigné that the sight of noisy gatherings will only fill them with disgust instead of tempting them to imitation.

So far there is nothing anti-feminist in Rousseau's ideas. But unfortunately we have come to the end of what is positive and his further utterances rather advocate woman's subjection than her enfranchisement. The habit of reverting to first principles which is so dominant a characteristic of his Nature-theory makes him draw a parallel between the sexes upon the foundation of those innate qualities which constitute the sexual character. Men and women are the same in whatever is independent of sex, and radically different, almost diametrically opposed, in all that pertains to it. Thus all disputes regarding equality are vain, for "in what the sexes have in common they are naturally equal, and in that in which they differ no comparison is possible". And woman is to be congratulated upon this diversity, for in it lies the great secret of her subtle power. Where woman asserts the natural rights which arise from this difference she is superior to man ; where she tries to usurp the natural rights of the opposite sex she remains hopelessly below their level. The two sexes have different spheres of activity, and each sex can do well only in its own sharply-defined sphere.

Reason itself demands this stress laid on the contrast between the sexes. For, says Rousseau, once women are brought up to be as like men as possible, their authority and influence, *which are rooted*

1) The education recommended for Emile is not domestic. He was to be kept carefully isolated from the world, so as to escape its taint, until such time as his character would be fully matured, placing him above the reach of disastrous influences. A similar principle had prevailed at Mme de Maintenon's establishment of St. Cyr.

*in their being essentially different*, will be lost without a substitute. This remark is one of great wisdom and psychological insight. Rousseau saw what many extreme feminists are so apt to forget, that those who wish to develop in women those qualities which naturally belong to man, and to suppress in them what is proper to their own sex, are in reality doing them irreparable harm.

There are, according to Rousseau, a male empire and a female one. The former rests upon a foundation of superior physical strength and mental superiority; but although the stronger sex are masters in appearance, they in reality depend on the weaker. For the female empire, *established by Nature herself*, derives its strength from those delicate feminine charms which command the worship of that gallantry which Nature again has instilled into the hearts of men.

In giving this interpretation of female power and influence Rousseau exposed himself to attack. The platonic worship, we have seen, had sadly degenerated, and what remained was a worthless, hypocritical imitation which was felt by well-meaning women as an insult rather than a compliment. But what called down a storm of feminist indignation upon his head was the sweeping conclusion he drew from the natural law that man, having physical strength on his side, must always play the active part in the intercourse between people of different sexes, while woman has to be always content with the passive rôle. "The sole object of women," says Rousseau, "ought consequently to be *to please* men, on whom their relative weakness has made them dependent", and goes on to assert that all female education should as a natural consequence be "relative to men".

There is in the above passage, which shows that on the subject of feminism Rousseau, instead of a revolutionary, was rather a conservative, nothing to suggest the bold and daring vindication of female rights that was so soon to resound in the philosophical world like a mighty trumpet-blast. His ideas about the position of Woman are characteristic of his want of equilibrium in presenting a bewildering chaos of judicious observations and unaccountable oversights. It is not so much that some of his statements are untrue, as that they are incomplete. In drawing sweeping conclusions from the physical inferiority of the sex he deliberately closes his eyes to their moral and mental possibilities. It is true that the insists upon a moral education for women, but whatever of merit may be contained in this claim is instantly neutralised by its only object: making women more acceptable companions to their husbands, contributing to the happi-

ness of the latter by unwearying devotion and unalterable constancy. There are undoubtedly many women to whom the above would seem the most acceptable task, as there are others whose consciousness of their talents would make them indignantly reject so subordinate a part. As long as women are not cut after the same pattern, allowance will have to be made for individual propensities and any theory, however cleverly put together, will succeed with some types of womanhood and hopelessly fail with others.

St. Marc Girardin indignantly remarks that the condition of the women in Rousseau's Nature-scheme suggests the oriental seraglio. This is an exaggeration, for the "relative education" is qualified by Rousseau to such an extent that the harem-picture which it may at first conjure up is considerably modified. He wished the term "made to please men" to be understood in a far wider meaning than the merely sensual, for no one realised better than he that in the absence of a spiritual element no love based upon the grosser passions can possibly endure.

Where the female weaknesses and vanities are concerned Rousseau's discernment even surpasses that of Fénelon. The task of woman being to please, Nature has made her regard above all things the opinion of the opposite sex. And the moralist who teaches men to ignore the opinion of others as destructive of individuality, goes so far as to prescribe for women an unlimited deference to opinion and reputation. "Opinion, which is the grave of virtue among men, ought to be among women its high throne". The utilitarian question : "A quoi cela est-il bon?", which is to be the guiding principle in Emile's case, changes its character where Sophie is concerned, and becomes : "Quel effet cela fera-t-il?" The question what impression a thing will produce naturally leads to putting the shadow before the substance, and appearance before reality, and as such may have a most disastrous effect.

Sophie's love of needlework is accounted for not so much by considerations of usefulness as by the reflection that this delicate occupation will make her appear to advantage to her admirer. The same train of thoughts makes her abominate the useful occupation of cooking, by which her hands might become soiled. Did Rousseau actually imagine that his much-recommended simplicity in dress would hold out against the innate love of finery which was to help in the accomplishment of what he considered the chief aim of womanhood ?

Rousseau certainly did not mean to imply that woman must of necessity be morally inferior to man, but simply that Nature had ordained that she shall be subjected to his superior strength, to his cooler judgment and to his superior common sense. He was certainly capable of imagining an ideal female, and of worshipping in her the essentially sexual qualities which make her differ from man. That portion of the fifth book of *Emile* which deals with the first meeting between the lovers leaves little doubt as to how he pictured to himself his ideal of womanhood. The philosophical treatise is more than once in danger of becoming a romance, embodying the slightly sobered ideals of courtship of the author of "*Julie*". It cannot be denied that Sophie has charm and that her subjection to Emile is not oppressive. But to form a correct notion of Rousseau's ideas regarding the social position of women we must strip the story of its lyrical element and glance at the purely philosophical portion of the treatise. It is there that we must look for an answer to the question : "Did Rousseau look upon women as partakers of the faculty of Reason ?" And he gives his reply in the following words : "L'art de penser n'est pas étranger aux femmes, mais elles ne doivent faire qu'effleurer les sciences de raisonnement." He would not even object to a system by which the functions of women were strictly limited to the performance of sexual duties, if it were not that utter ignorance would make them fall a too easy prey to rascally adventurers ! The subsequent statement that, after all, it being the task of woman to get herself esteemed, *so as to justify her husband's choice*, a litte knowledge would not come amiss, does not mend matters in its re-introduction of the relativity-principle. Here indeed, Rousseau "pitches the pipe too low".

Woman's special domain is that of sentiment. But the very "sensibility" which renders her more alluring by contrast, prevents her from forming a sound judgment. This appreciation of women appears clearly in the passages of *Emile* in which the choice of a religion is discussed. Emile is not allowed to decide until he has completed his eighteenth year, when he is made to judge for himself, uninfluenced by his tutor. Sophie's religious notions, on the contrary, are carefully instilled by her parents at an early age, it being silently taken for granted that she will never arrive at a degree of understanding which will enable her to form her own convictions. "The female reason is of a practical nature, which renders them very quick to find the means of arriving at a fixed conclusion, but *does not enable them*

*to form that conclusion independently of others*". Again that utter dependence, that total lack of individuality which characterises Rousseau's female ideal. "My daughter", says Sophie's father, "knowledge does not belong to your age; when the time has come, your husband will instruct you."

The amount of actual instruction in Rousseau's scheme is reduced to a minimum. There is no knowing what damage may be done to the unstable female imagination by the dangerous literature of the time. Here we recognise the author of the Dijon prize-essay with its crushing conclusion. Rousseau frankly hated the "femme bel esprit". Sophie's mind is to be formed by observation and reflection, and not by books. But how can Sophie be supposed to reflect, one might ask, unless she had certain fundamental truths pointed out to her, the instilment of which is not the work of every parent, however well-intentioned? It is Rousseau's fatal mistake that he cannot bring himself to realisé that moral culture simply cannot exist without a certain amount of intellectual culture. He wanted to have both granted to men, and his conclusions tended to withhold both from women. The march of humanity finds him in the first rank of those who were pioneers; the feminist movement, while recognising his cleverness, looks upon him as a dangerous, and sometimes does him the injustice of calling him an hypocritical enemy.

The charge of insincerity has, indeed, been often brought against him, although he has found some defenders also. However, he is condemned by most women. Mrs. Fawcett, in her introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, opines that a man who made so light of his duties towards his own children, and whose married life was so full of blame has no right to pronounce on problems which require the disinterestedness and self-abnegation of the pure idealist. Where Rousseau points out the shortcomings of the women, of his time and regrets them, he is with Mary Wollstonecraft; where he fails to show the way by which improvement may be attained, he remains hopelessly behind one who, with considerably less genius, had a great deal more moral courage and a far wider conception of the ideals of woman.

Of the disciples and opponents of Rousseau, some of whom, like Mme de Staël, Mme de Genlis, and Mme de Necker de Saussure were of the female sex, little need be said here, as their writings either did not throw any new light on the problem under consideration, or belong to a period following that of Mary Wollstonecraft. When the

Revolution came, bringing with it an increased demand for a public education, some of its theorists, who like Condorcet, showed an interest in the female part of the problem, will call for mention.

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## CHAPTER IV.

*Feminist and Anti-Feminist Tendencies among the English Augustans.*

In studying the march of feminism among the two rival nations on either side the Channel, one cannot help being struck by the remarkable lateness of anything resembling a feminist movement in England. That the women of mediaeval England were looked down upon, not only on account of their inferior muscular strength, but also on the score of their supposed want of mental and moral stability, appears but too plainly from the numerous scornful references to the weaker sex in the literature if those days. The Song-collections of the Transition Period clearly betray the "esprit gaulois" in their brutal estimate of woman and in the tone of undisguised contempt and ridicule which prevails whenever women are the theme. The often-repeated story of the henpecked husband and the shrewish wife contains a warning against marriage which, although couched in the form of banter, evidently has its foundation in the general conviction of female depravity. The early plays with their brawling scenes and stock female characters were also most unfavourable to women. Nor did the early Renaissance bring any marked improvement either in the female morals or in the male appreciation of them, for the satires against women continued with hardly a refutation. The improvement which resulted in Ascham's days from the awakening female interest in learning and in the Caroline period from the introduction into poetry of the Platonic love ideal, was too partial and too qualified to be permanent, and in later years the Puritanic ideal of womanhood was an abomination to feminists of the Wollstonecraft type. But the general estimate of women in England had never been lower than in the notorious days that followed the Restoration. In the Middle Ages alle influence had been denied them on the score of their supposed inferiority of understanding and inequality of temper: the men of the reign of Charles II regarded them merely as fair dissemblers and utter strangers to the nobler motives, in which opinion the ladies

of the age did all they could to confirm them. The higher the society in which they moved, the less likely they were to escape the many vices which prevailed in that age of depravity and libertinism. There were, of course, the Puritans, who were forced by circumstances to lead lives of retirement, regarding the vicious excesses of Whitehall with disgust and jealously guarding their women against degrading influences. The puritan ideal of womanhood was thus preserved; but there was no promise for the future in the state of close confinement and complete submission which the Judaic notions of Puritanism demanded.

In those days, when night was darkest, a faint glimmer of a coming dawn was seen. It consisted in some women beginning to take a modest share in literary pursuits. When late in the seventeenth and early in the 18th century the modern novel was passing through its preparatory stage, Mrs. Aphra Behn, Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Haywood and some other women realised that here was a new domain of literature in which woman was qualified by her fertile imagination and quick power of observation to excel. Even before the Restoration, the birth of a new social problem dealing with the relative positions of the sexes was heralded in the works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle [1]). However, public opinion stamped any such efforts — whether conscious or no — as immature, and therefore doomed to failure.

All through the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century women were regarded from a purely sexual point of view; they were, as Mr. Lyon Blease calls it "enveloped in an atmosphere of sex". Their being judged exclusively by a sexual standard entailed as a necessary consequence the scornful neglect of those among them who were disqualified by age or lack of physical attractions. If the lot of the married women was often a sad one, considering the habitual inconstancy of husbands, the condition of those who had drawn a blank in the matrimonial lottery was even more pitiable. Hence that desperate hunting for husbands which it is among the most creditable performances of modern feminism to have lessened. It is easy to understand that it is among forsaken married women and especially among the more pronounced spinsters that we must look for such elements of female wisdom and virtue as the barren age affords. The middle-aged mother of a family was sometimed possessed of a certain hard-acquired dignity; and to the often bitter experiences

1) "*The World's Olio*" (1655) contains an essay on "*The Inferiority of Woman, morally and physically*".

of spinsterhood we owe women of the type of Mary Astell. But contemporary literature, while on the whole inclined to be lenient towards married women who became "stricken in years" was almost uniformly severe in dealing with the "old maid of fiction", and the unmarried female had to await the broader days of humanitarianism to have her troubles understood and her wrongs righted.

But even the more privileged among the female sex, those who in their personal attractions possessed some kind of coin, the value of which masculine opinion was not slow to recognise, were not much better off than their plain sisters. The prevailing views regarding the place of women in social life were the direct outcome of the general tendencies of egoism and materialism by which the age was characterised. Woman was regarded only in her relations to the male sex, and, what was worse, woman herself had not yet learned to rebel against the shackles of a convention of centuries, unquestioningly adopted the male verdict and tried her hardest to become what the opposite sex wanted her to be. They found it easy to relinquish all individuality, and live up to the ideal set up by a degenerated manhood, and readily assumed the vices which their lack of any sense of moral responsibility prevented them from recognising as such. This total absence of moral purpose is a characteristic of the age which was not restricted to women only. The moral standard had sunk very low indeed, existence among the better situated seemed exclusively devoted to the pursuit of pleasure with all its attendant vices. From the male standpoint this view of life determined the esteem in which the female sex was held. The eighteenth century "beau" regarded woman only as an instrument of animal passion, which hypocrisy tried very successfully to gild over with a varnish of mock gallantry that was a remnant of better times of Platonic chivalry, and aroused the indignation of moralists. This gallantry tried to make up in extravagance for what it lacked in sincerity. The pursuit of the object of his passion led the libertine to the most absurd excesses which were very far removed from a devout worship [1]). Love had become a grossly sensual passion, and women were treated with exaggerated ceremony, but with little respect. Men held with Pope that "every woman is at heart a rake", and treated them accordingly. They laid a mock siege to what was conventionally called "the female heart" and when that fortress in an unguarded moment surrendered or was taken by

1) See Forsyth, *Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 18—24.

storm, the conqueror, after enjoying the spoils of his victory, left the poor victim to pay the penalty of social excommunication and flaunted his conquest in the face of a society which maintained a double standard of morality, and in which seduction and adultery on the part of the male were held to be titles of honour.

To fully understand the eighteenth century interpretation of the passion of love we have only to scan the pages of that new form of fiction, the novel, which has supplied us with a truthful and lifelike picture of the morals and manners of the time. In many of them the heroine is made the object of libertine attempts which to the twentieth century reader are absolutely revolting. It is true that she does not submit to the outrage, but defends her honour as well as she is able — strange to say, the eighteenth century heroine, apart from a few females of the picaresque kind, is generally represented as virtuous and chaste, rather a picture of womanhood as the author liked to imagine than a faithful one, a circumstance for which the presence of a moral purpose may account — but the secondary female characters are often of a frailty which contrasts strongly with it. The "*Memoirs of a Lady of Quality*" in *Peregrine Pickle*, for instance, are a frank confession of the most shameless female profligacy, and the outrages upon decorum and good taste described in them are corroborated by numerous descriptions of female indecency and wantonness displayed either in the baths of the fashionable watering-places or at the masquerades which were in great vogue, giving the female sex ample opportunity for displaying their charms with an utter want of delicacy. Nor were the "bucks", "beaux" or "maccaronies" at all inclined to be particular with regard to the language they used in the presence of ladies. The obscenity of their conversation aroused the indignation of Swift's Stella, but upon the whole women were too much accustomed to the coarseness of male conversation to think of protesting, nor did their parents or husbands think it necessary to interfere. Besides which, the dialogue of those novels which constituted their daily amusement was of much the same kind, and even the works of an Aphra Behn or a Mrs. Manley were read freely in the presence of young girls without being considered in the least offensive to feminine delicacy.

The improvement which the latter half of the century witnessed in this respect was, as we shall see, in no small measure due to female influence. The Bluestocking circles were largely instrumental in bringing about this purifying of conversational and literary taste.

The female novelists of the next generation, while following in the steps of Richardson and Fielding, and imitating their choice of incidents, do not imitate their revolting coarseness. The stories of libertinage and violence occur in a much modified form, and the treatment is less offensive and not unfrequently humorous, taking the edge off the indelicacy of many a doubtful situation.

The chief literary exponents of female depravity, satirising women for what they were and hardly allowing an exception to the general rule, forgetting the part of men in their degraded state, and regarding the prospect of improvement with a degree of scepticism which has made them the abomination of feminists, were Alexander Pope and Lord Chesterfield. Pope's estimate of the sex, contained in the second of the "*Moral Essays*", and confirmed by numerous allusions in his other works, ranks him among those who jeer at women in general. Their two prevailing passions according to him, are "love of pleasure", and "love of sway":

> "Men, some to bus'ness, some to pleasure take,
> But every woman is at heart a rake:
> Men, some to quiet, some to public strife,
> But every lady would be queen for life."

The former he is rather inclined to excuse, for "where the lesson taught is but to please, can Pleasure be a fault?" But the latter contains in it the germs of unavoidable wretchedness to the woman who outlives the power and influence which beauty grants her and whose punishment consists in finding herself in later years friendless and neglected, and without the redeeming blessing of a cultivated intellect and a sensitive heart, which

> ".....shall grow, while what fatigues the ring
> Flaunts and goes down, an unregarded thing."

The many inconsistencies in the female character are passed in review and scourged with the whip of a satirist who does not care to rack his brains for means of improvement, but whose egoism revels in the intellectual delight of scathing ridicule. Women make their very changeability a means of attracting suitors, they are "like variegated tulips," showing many colours and attracting chiefly by variety:

> "Yet ne'er so sure our passion to create
> As when she touched the brink of all we hate."

It was no doubt Pope's intention to run down the entire female sex, but while uttering the above insinuation, he seems fatally blind to the very questionable light the successful application of certain female devices reflected on the contemporary male character!

From a purely feminist point of view, the name of "cold-hearted rascal", by which Mary Wollstonecraft distinguished the Earl of Chesterfield, although not altogether deserved — for where his son was concerned he was anything but "cold-hearted" — may be easily accounted for. Whenever woman is the subject, his contentions as well as his tone of uttering them betray a callous, contemptuous cynicism which marks the man of fashion who "knows the season, when to take occasion by the hand", and has been taught by the intricacies of diplomacy to regard women from a purely egoistical standpoint as political weathercocks, whose undeniable influence may be turned to account, but upon whom otherwise no judgment can be too severe. There is in his writings no trace of interest whatever in women for their own sake; despising them for their weaknesses, he regards them merely as possible instruments by which his personal ends may be furthered. The morality preached in the famous "*Letters to his Son*" (written between the years 1739 and 1768, representing the dawn of the Bluestocking movement) has been severely and deservedly criticised. Their worst defect as well as their greatest danger is that while containing a number of maxims which are absolutely repugnant in their cynicism, they were written for an educational purpose and pretended to instil the ways of conscious virtue "which is the only solid foundation of all happiness."[1] Another objection is that he insisted far too much on "the graces" (i. e. deportment), while almost forgetting to recommend the more solid acquirements of the character. Mrs. Chapone complained that he substituted appearances for the real excellences which she considered more important, and Mrs. Delany wrote that his letters were generally considered ingenious and useful as to polish of manners, but very hurtful in a moral sense. "Les grâces", she added, "are the sum total of his religion." This, and the fact that he made a point of discussing moral questions of the greatest importance with a child not yet ten years old and incapable of grasping their full purport, afterwards made Mary Wollstonecraft turn upon him with her accustomed vehemence. No doubt she found this education of deliberate cynicism

1) Letter 126.

more difficult to forgive than even his cold contempt of the female sex.

Chesterfield wanted to perfect his son in what he considered the most important of arts, to be recommended to both sexes with equal emphasis : that of pleasing. No man held more by opinion as a means of reaching aims than he. To read his correspondence one might think the chief aim of life to be a perfect mastery of the art of "wriggling oneself into favour", with all its attendant insincerity and duplicity. Such was the man whose advice the bishop of Waterford asked in respect to the kind of reading to be permitted to his daughters [1]).

When women are the topic, Lord Chesterfield invariably appears at his worst. Nowhere in literature do we find a lower estimate of the sex and a more sneeringly insolent ridicule of their foibles. Little is known about the marriage of young Philip Stanhope, who even forgot to inform his father of the circumstance, and who died too soon after to test the truth of his father's teaching that "husband and wife are commonly clogs upon each other." However, with such a mentor his chances of happiness in the matrimonial state would have been slight in any case.

In the first place Lord Chesterfield regards women as intellectually inferior and beneath notice. They are to him only "children of a larger growth" [2]) who seldom reason or act consistently ; their best resolutions being swayed by their inordinate passions, which their reason is to weak to keep under constant control. Even the so-called "femme forte", — of which type Catherine the Second was a prominent representative — was in his eyes only another proof of this statement ; for at bottom all women are Machiavelians and they cannot do anything with moderation, sentiment always getting the better of reason [3]). They do not appreciate or even understand the language of common sense, and the proper tone to be adopted in their presence is "the polite jargon of good company" [4]).

His opinion of female morals is not more flattering. Women are capable of, and ruled by two passions : vanity and love, of which the latter is made dependent upon the former. "He who flatters them most pleases them best ; and they are most in love with him

1) Letter 298.
2) Letter 76.
3) Letter 481.
4) Letter 78.

who they think is the most in love with them" [1]). They value their beauty — real or imaginary — above everything, and in this respect "scarce any flattery is too gross for them to follow".

The above, if true, might be a reason for a man to rather avoid female company than court it. However, says Chesterfield, low as they are, we cannot afford to ignore them, for it is not to be denied that they are a social power. "As women are a considerable, or at least a pretty numerous part of company; and as their suffrages go a long way towards establishing a man's character in the fashionable part of the world (which is of great importance to the fortune and figure he proposes to make in it), it is necessary *to please* them". The sole use of women in Chesterfield's eyes is that they may be turned into a ladder for social advancement: "here women may be put to some use"; and he who has discovered the right way of humouring them may serve his own interest by cultivating their acquaintance and fooling them to the top of their bent with judicious and cleverly administered flattery. Of all Chesterfield's insinuations this is certainly the worst.

But how is woman to be pleased? The scheme for social promotion involves an effort to please on an even more general scale. Women feel a contempt for men who pass their time in "ruelles", making themselves their voluntary slaves; they value those most who are held in the highest esteem among their fellowmen; for this will render their conquest by a woman worth her while. However, to please men, and gain influence among them, the concurrence of women is indispensable, and so forth, ad nauseam.

Practical hints are not wanting either. The best stepping-stones to fortune are "a sort of veteran women of condition" who, besides having great experience, feel flattered by the least attention from a young fellow and in return render him excellent services by pointing out to him those manners and attentions which pleased and engaged them when they were in the pride of their first youth and beauty, and are therefore the most likely to prove effective.

In conclusion, two instances may here be quoted of the excellent father's recommendable advice to his son in regard to the exploitation of female sympathies. The first regards that Mme du Bocage whose name will be mentioned again in connection with her relations to the Bluestocking circles in England. When young Stanhope was residing

1) Letter 124.

in Paris and frequenting some salons, Lord Chesterfield advised his son to make the French lady his confidante and confess to her his eagerness "to please", asking her in true hypocritical fashion to teach him her secret of pleasing everybody. Offered under different circumstances this might have been a pretty compliment, coming as it did from the pen of such a cynic and confirmed womanhater it was about the worst insult that could be offered to a lady of "esprit" and dignity.

But the second passage is even worse. The exemplary father here suggests a full scheme for political advancement through the intermediacy of a lady of unsullied reputation, who was to be courted and inveigled into granting her concurrence in a manner so beyond words that we must let the letter speak for itself. "A propos, on m'assure que Mme de Blot, sans avoir des traits, est joli comme un coeur, et que nonobstant cela, elle s'en est tenu jusqu'ici scrupuleusement à son mari, quoiqu'il ait déja plus qu'un an qu'elle est mariée. Elle n'y pense pas ; il faut décrotter cette femme-là. Décrottez vous donc tous les deux réciproquement. Force, assiduités, attentions, regards tendres, et déclarations passionnées de votre côté produiront au moins quelque velléité du sien. Et quand une fois la velléité y est, les oeuvres ne sont pas loin."

Social life in the eighteenth century had indeed sunk to the appalling depth which such letters as Chesterfield's reveal, through an utter lack of purpose. The time was entirely void of social interest. At a time when the French philosophy which had been so largely stimulated by British example found its way into the assemblies of Paris, awakening a vivid intellectual interest in thousands of minds and giving birth to a national thought-life which laid the theoretical foundations not only of the coming changes in the social order, but also of that glorious edifice of science of which the nineteenth century was to witness the rapid growth — English society was content to let things remain as they were and did not at once respond to the call that came from beyond the Channel. If England, too, contained a number of social abuses that were rank and appealed to the justice of Heaven, they did not heed them. The self-sufficiency thus revealed remained characteristic of the better classes in England, and was in the majority of cases increased rather than lessened by the outbreak of the Revolution, when most Englishmen felt secure in the conviction that in England there were no great wrongs to be righted. It had its origin in gross selfishness and coarse materialism, which did not leave the

bulk of the nation an opportunity to realise the miserable condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, — in England itself there was comparatively little pauperism in the beginning — or the gross injustice of the prevailing system of Parliamentary representation, or the cruelty of punishments, or the abominable condition of the jails in which thousands of small offenders were abandoned to the horrors of slow and gradual extinction, or the shame of the execrable system of slaverny prevailing in the colonies. It was not until the second half of the century that the great humanitarian movement began to make rapid progress ; before that great dawn British society remained undisturbed while pursuing their round of pleasure which was interrupted only by death. Of the heralds of a better time, who acted according to their lights, and of whom some were doomed to failure, while others were to see their efforts crowned with ultimate success, it is gratifying to think that a fair percentage were women. If the education of men was sadly inadequate, that of women was so hopelessly neglected that ladies of quality could hardly sign their own name. They were, upon the whole, quite content to remain in ignorance. Their horror of the "femme savante" was such, that all appearance of even the slightest degree of learning was carefully avoided. The result was disastrous. Dean Swift can hardly be said to rank among the defenders of the sex, and yet even he recognised the absurdity of this utter ignorance. In a letter, dated October 7th 1734, occurring in Mrs. Delany's correspondence, and addressed to her, he says : "I speak for the public good of this country ; because a pernicious heresy prevails here among the men, that it is the duty of your sex to be fools in every article except what is merely domestic; and to do the ladies justice, there are very few of them without a good share of that heresy, except upon one article, that they have as little regard for family business as for the improvement of their minds." He proposes to "carry Mrs. Delany about among his adversaries", and (I will) "dare them to produce one instance where your *want of ignorance* makes you affected, pretending, conceited, disdainful, endeavouring to speak like a scholar, with twenty more faults objected by themselves, their lovers or their husbands. But I fear your case is desperate, for I know you never laugh at a jest before you understand it, and I must question whether you understand a fan, or have so good a fancy at silks as others ; and your way of spelling would not be intelligible."

Only those qualities were considered worth developing which were

calculated to excite desire in the opposite sex. Women were skilled in the commonplace conversation of the gaming-table, and were taught to dance and to play the spinet, or the harpsichord, and to say ballads, regardless of talent. Household duties and needlework were held in less repute, and the qualities of the mind were utterly disregarded. All feminine education was deliberately discouraged. [1]

In marriage the wife was completely subjected to the husband's authority. If he proved inconstant — which was the rule — and transferred his attentions to other women, it was considered most unwise in the wife to object, the approved course being to pretend ignorance of the fact, lest the husband should be displeased at being taken to task by his inferior. About 1700 Lord Halifax's "*Advice to a Daughter*" was published ; and being the reflections of a man of recognised social abilities, became a standard-work not only in England, but also on the other side the Channel, where it was translated into French and repeatedly quoted with great deference. Viewed in the light of the conditions then prevailing it must be unreservedly admitted that the advice is absolutely the best that could be given under the circumstances. Mr. Lyon Blease's indignation in quoting it, seems due rather to very natural disgust at the social conditions that necessitated it, than to the nature of the advice in itself. Lord Halifax exhorts his daughter to consider that she "lives in a time which hath rendered some kind of frailties so habitual that they lay claim to large grains of allowance." This reasoning would seem faulty to a moralist, but there is more. "This being so, remember that next to the danger of committing the fault yourself, *the greatest is that*

1) The above statement may at first sight seem rather too sweeping. But it is supported by the authority of Mary Astell (cf. page 90), who in her "*Serious Proposal to the Ladies*" remarks that it was generally considered quite unnecessary to waste money on the education of daughters. Most parents, she says, "*took as much pains to beat girls away from knowledge as to beat boys towards it*". She was quite aware that her scheme for the establishment of a nunnery in which the daughters of the aristocracy were to be saved from neglect must be shocking to the parents of her generation, who feared that such an education might in all probability corrupt their morals(!) and would certainly *prevent them from marrying*. In this lies the gist of all deliberate discouragement of female learning. The only object in a girl's life being to make a suitable match, — meaning a wealthy one, — it followed that everything was subordinated to this consideration. And it unfortunately happened that the men of the century preferred their partners in wedlock silly and ignorant, and consequently easy-going and submissive.

At one time Mary Astell's scheme came very near to realisation. The devout, intellectual and wealthy Lady Elizabeth Hastings became interested in it and declared herself willing to supply the necessary funds. But it so happened that Bishop Burnet heard of the plan and of the promised donation. A scheme for a rational education for girls struck this conservative churchman as so absurd that in his Anglican hatred of Catholicism he rather irrelevantly referred to it as "a popish project", using all his influence to divert Lady Elizabeth's charity, in which effort he was completely successful.

*of seeing it in your husband*. Do not seem to look or hear that way, if he is a man of sense he will reclaim himself; the folly of it is of itself sufficient to cure him; if he is not so, he will be provoked, but not reformed." In other words he advises her to "eat her half loaf and be happy", rather than disturb her share of happiness by aiming higher than is compatible with the character and morality of the average male. Halifax further observes that a benign indulgence on the wife's part for the husband's wanderings will "make him more yielding in other things", i. e. he admonishes his daughter to make a compromise, enabling her to acquire certain advantages by conniving at her husband's faithlessness! This is certainly pretty bad; but there seems no room for any doubt that Halifax indeed struck the key-note of eighteenth century opinion.

So far we have looked at the purely negative side of the picture, which presents no features that can be called redeeming. Before passing to the brighter side to examine the utterances of those who aimed at the moral improvement of the female sex, or at an amelioration of their social position, or both, we shall have to make some mention of the views expressed by Swift in his "*Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage*". The general tone is certainly not encouraging. It holds the male sex to be absolutely superior in matters physical, intellectual and moral. While criticising with his habitual sarcasm the errors, fopperies and vices of the female sex, Swift does not even trouble to consider what has made them so depraved. The nearest suggestion of possible blame to the male sex in regard to their treatment of women is to be found in a passage in the "*Hints towards an Essay on Conversation*". There are certain signs of a coming dawn in this passage. After complaining of the degeneracy of conversation, "with the pernicious consequences thereof upon our humours and dispositions," Swift suggests that it may be partly owing to "the custom arisen for some time past of excluding women from any share in our society, farther than in parties at play, or dancing, or in the pursuit of an amour." In this respect he readily admits the superiority of the more peaceable part of Charles the First's reign, "the highest period of politeness in England," when the example set by France, and the love-ideals prevailing among French society found English followers, "and although we are apt to ridicule the sublime Platonic notions they had, or personated, in love and friendship; I conceive their refinements were grounded upon reason, and that a little grain of the romance is no ill ingredient to preserve and

exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid, vicious and low." This astonishing avowal on the part of one so inclined to cynicism throws a most unfavourable light upon the relations between the sexes in the early years of the eighteenth century.

However, if it could not be denied that manners and morals had decayed, Swift never doubted that the female sex were chiefly responsible. In his advice to the young bride their depravity is contrasted with the sound wisdom and the more dignified conduct(!) of their lords and masters. Swift satirises the worthlessness of the females who spend their afternoon visiting their neighbours to indulge in talking scandal, and whose evenings are devoted to the gambling-table. His opinion of the sex in general is such as to make him emphatically warn his young *protégée* against the dangers of female conversation. "Your only safe way of conversing with them is, by a firm resolution to proceed in your practice and behaviour directly contrary to whatever they say or do." The fondness of the sex for finery disgusts him to such an extent, that he "cannot conceive them to be human creatures, but a certain sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey."

Such was the verdict Swift passed upon the women of his time, whose moral ideals, he was willing to grant, might be and ought to be the same as those of men, always excepting "a certain reservedness, which however, as they manage it, is nothing but affection and hypocrisy."

Man being superior to woman in every respect, also morally, it follows that her chief aim should be to render herself more worthy of him. Swift here introduces that pernicious theory of "relativity" which in Rousseau's "*Emile*" was to arouse the indignation of Mary Wollstonecraft. An effort is to be made to raise women out of that pool of iniquity into which they have sunk, not so much for the sake of their precious souls, as to render them more acceptable companions to men. Whatever in Swift seems to favour a certain degree of emancipation owes its origin to this consideration. He does not believe in what he calls "the exalted passion of a French romance". By the time his first passion is spent, the husband will want a companion to amuse and cheer his leisure hours. Some provision should be made for the years to come when, beauty having disappeared forever, it will be necessary to fall back upon the accomplishments of the mind as a substitute, by means of which the husband's esteem

may be gained. Thus, by a process differing materially from that of the feminists, Swift arrives at the same conclusion ; viz. that the first step towards improvement is the institution of some kind of mental education for women. At the same time he has little confidence in the mental capacities of the female sex, so that his claims are in truth modest enough. Books of history and travel represent the limit of what he deems them capable of grasping ; and he even recommends the making extracts from them, should the fair reader's memory happen to be a little weak ! For the rest the task of instructing woman will necessarily devolve upon man ; i.e. upon the husband and upon those of his friends whom he judges best calculated to enrich her mind by their advice and conversation, and to set her right should her imagination tend to lead her judgment astray ! "Learned women," in the full sense of the term, were an abomination to Swift, who believed the average female intellect to be so deficient that "they could never arrive in point of learning to the perfection of a schoolboy."

There can be no doubt that Swift's estimate of female capabilities was the general one, which makes it all the more astonishing to find that as early as 1673 a deliberate attempt was made to "raise women to the dignity and usefulness which distinguished their ancestresses", by giving them an education which included a rather considerable amount of knowledge. A school for girls was founded in that year by a certain Mrs. Makin, who explained her purpose in "*An Essay to revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen in Religion, Manners, Arts, and Tongues ; with an Answer to the Objection against this Way of Education*", dedicated to Mary, daughter of James, Duke of York. The author protests against "the barbarous custom to breed women low", which arises from the general belief that women are not endowed with the same reason as man. Learning, and even virtue, in a woman are "scorned and neglected as pedantic things, fit only for the vulgar", and the creation of schools seems the only way to restore women to the place they once held. Mrs. Makin wisely refrains from asking too much, and therefore will not "as some have wittily done, plead for female pre-eminence. To ask too much, is the way to be denied all". A plea, therefore, for female education as a means of improving female morals. Curiously enough, one of her pupils, Elizabeth Drake, was destined to become Mrs. Robinson, and the mother of that Elizabeth Robinson who as Mrs. Montagu became the recognised queen of the Bluestockings.

To strengthen her argument Mrs. Makin points to a number of women who were proficient in knowledge among the Ancients, after which she refers to some Englishwomen of great erudition, as : Lady Jane Grey, Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of Newcastle, "who overtops many grave gownsmen", and the princess Elizabeth, daughter of Charles the First, whose tutoress Mrs. Makin had been.

Her school for gentlewomen was situated at Tottenham High Cross, then within four miles of London, on the road to Ware, "where by the blessing of God, gentlewomen may be instructed in the principles of religion and in all manner of sober and virtuous education: more particularly in alle things ordinarily taught in other schools." Half the time available for study, according to the sort of prospectus with which the essay closes, was to be devoted to foreign languages, particularly Latin and French, and those who wanted further instruction could be served with "Greek, Hebrew, Italian, and Spanish, in all which this gentlewoman hath a competent knowledge." As a linguist, therefore, Mrs. Makin here constitutes herself the rival of the famous translator of Epictetus, Mrs. Carter. But she realised that the gift of languages is not granted everybody. "Those who think one language enough for a woman may forbear the languages and learn only (!) experimental philosophy."

That the lady herself regarded the undertaking more or less as an experiment appears from the fact that the terms were made dependent on the success achieved. The minimum was twenty pounds per annum, but in case of very marked improvement "something more would be expected", it being left to the happy parents to judge how much more was due to the preceptress.

A discourse on the "practicability of the scheme" was to be delivered by a proxy "every Tuesday at Mrs. Mason's Coffee House in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange ; and Thursdays at the 'Bolt and Tun' in Fleet Street, between the hours of three and six in the afternoon."

That in Mrs. Robinson's case, at least, Mrs. Makin's efforts had not been wholly in vain, is demonstrated by the fact that her children called their mother "Mrs. Speaker", probably in connection with her easy flow of language in the miniature contests of wit that used to be held among them, which were no doubt an excellent preparation for the later Mrs. Montagu's social task.

If we consider that both Port Royal and St. Cyr aimed far more at instilling moral principles than imparting useful knowledge and

that neither in France nor in England had so sweeping an assertion ever been put forward, it seems only giving Mrs. Makin her due to allow her a prominent place among the pioneers of female education in Europe.

The history of feminism is as much that of the indirect influences fostering the movement while slowly and almost imperceptibly leavening the whole of society, as that of the direct and embittered struggle for enfranchisement. The earlier half of the eighteenth century cannot boast any direct champions of the cause beyond that Mary Astell of whom it will be our business to speak presently, no martyrs out of whose sacrifice arose the hopes of better things to come, but there are some instances of men — and even of women — of letters who, while aiming at a less ambitious or even a different object, indirectly contributed to the growth of new opinions regarding the social status of women. Among them must be reckoned the essayists, whose aim was (as the General Advertisement of the *Tatler* has it) "to teach the minuter decencies and inferior duties, to regulate the practice of daily conversation, to correct those depravities which are rather ridiculous than criminal, and remove those grievances which, if they produce no lasting calamities, impress hourly vexation." Life is chiefly made up of such seeming trifles, and the men who by pointing out the shortcomings of humanity bring about an improvement in the general morals may claim to be mentioned among the benefactors of mankind. Where the correction of the slighter errors was avowedly the object in view, the essayists were naturally drawn to consider the relations between the sexes, to criticise women freely, and to point out the ready way towards improvement. That the success they undeniably achieved was not — at least in its direct consequences — in proportion to the talent lavished on the essays, nor to the eagerness with which these literary efforts were devoured by the reading public, was due mainly to two causes. In the first place, considering probably that the times were not ripe for that more direct form of attack upon the stronghold of conventional manners and customs which in arousing opposition and resistance results in war to the knife and ends in the complete overthrow of one of the combatants, they chose to inculcate their moral lessons almost imperceptibly, assuming a light and bantering tone of ridicule which was not likely to give serious offence and might cause the reader to laugh at her own expense and perhaps make her consider how much of truth there lay in a criticism so jovially offered. No doubt this

plan was the wisest course under the circumstances then prevailing, but it is not the way in which thorough reforms arise. Moreover, the moral lessons were introduced so much at random, and with such utter lack of system; and the improvements suggested were so vague, that in stating that the periodical essay of the days of Addison and Steele helped in some measure to prepare the way for the more emphatic assertions of the later feminists, we have done the essayists full justice. Their feminism is indeed extremely qualified, and stamps them as the forerunners of the moralists among the Bluestockings, while leaving a very wide gulf between them and Mary Wollstonecraft.

The thought of making anything like a definite claim never entered their minds; the time for suggesting extensive social and political improvements was yet far off, and Addison and Steele were content to recommend in a general way the cultivation of the female mind as the readiest way to overcome the prevailing worthlessness and irresponsibility, thus continuing a line of thought which others had held before them, and bringing it under the public notice. This involves the supposition that the female mind is improveable to an eminent degree, and here Addison and Steele fully agree. In N°. 172 of the *Guardian* the latter, in giving an extract from a poem "in praise of the invention of writing, written by a lady", delivers himself of the sentiment that "the fair sex are as capable as men of the liberal sciences; and indeed there is no very good argument against the frequent instruction of females of condition this way, *but that they are too powerful without that advantage.*"

Addison in another number (155) of the same periodical says that "he has often wondered that learning is not thought a proper ingredient in the education of a woman of quality or fortune. Since they have the same improveable minds as the male part of the species, why should they not be cultivated by the same method? Why should reason be left to itself in one of the sexes, and be disciplined with so much care in the other?" An assertion, therefore, of the faculty of Reason in woman, and a denial of that much-professed sexual character upon which eighteenth century society was almost exclusively founded, and which Steele held to be the main cause of contemporary female inferiority. He complained (*Tatler* N°. 61) that the fact that the eighteenth century woman valued herself only on her beauty, caused her to be regarded by men on no other consideration as "a mere woman" from a purely sexual point of view; it being his opinion that the rule for pleasing long (which, with a want of

logic in matters of sex characteristic of his time, he held to be woman's chief consideration) was "to obtain such qualifications as would make them so, were they not women," and therefore without any reference to sex.

The superiority of the accomplishments of the mind over mere physical beauty is a favourite theme with Steele, and may be found illustrated in the usual way in N°. 33 of the *Spectator* in the character of the two sisters Lactitia and Daphne. The suitor whom the former's charms have captivated is not long in discovering that her pleasing appearance but ill conceals the insipidity of her character, and promptly transfers his affections to the less handsome but more cultured and therefore far more agreeable Daphne. And so Steele wants it to be realised that we commit a gross blunder when "in our daughters we take care of their persons and neglect their minds", whereas "in our sons we are so intent upon adorning their minds that we wholly neglect their bodies" (*Spectator* N°. 66). Strangely enough in a moralist, the ethical side of the question is here left out of discussion.

The conclusions drawn by both Steele and Addison from this neglect of the education of the mind are characteristic of the difference between the two. Steele observes that the unavoidable loss of her beauty through the ravages of time causes a woman in the prime of her years to be out of fashion and neglected, and he pleads earnestly for an education to be given to women, that they may have better chances of happiness in the later years of matrimony; whilst Addison with his habitual irony weakens the impression produced by his assertion of the perfectibility of the female mind, by ridiculing the much-discussed "femmes savantes" in his picture of Lady Lizard and her daughters reading Fontenelle's "*Pluralité des mondes*" while "busy preserving several fruits of the season, dividing their speculation between jellies and stars, and making a sudden transition from the sun to an apricot, or from the Copernican system to the figure of a cheese-cake." His treatment of the question is throughout tinged with sarcasm. "If the female tongue will be in motion", he says, after complaining of their *copia verborum*, "why should it not be set to go right?" Thus science might be made into an antidote to scandal and intrigue.

The most directly feminist among the authors of the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century was Mary Astell, the author of "*A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*", written in 1696. Her personality

and ideas remind us strongly of Mlle de Gournay, who lived nearly a century earlier. The conviction that all contact with the world and its wickedness would infallibly end in moral ruin had made Mary Astell the warm advocate of education in a nunnery, far from the madding crowd, where women might be brought up to lives of Christian virtue. The very fact, however, that she was not a worldly woman, made her overlook the circumstance that her scheme, however promising in theory, could never hope to stand the test of practice. It was to be expected that the first practical hint for an educational establishment for women — a hint which, however, was not more regarded than Mary Astell's had been — would come from one whose close contact with the outside world enabled him to do something more than brood over schemes that were incapable of realisation. Mary Astell in her religious zeal had entirely forgotten to take into account the innate proclivities of the female character. Daniel Defoe knew how to reconcile the demands of life and of womanhood with those of a moral educational establishment, and he suggested a scheme which was certainly more capable of being put into practice than Mary Astell's. But even he was firmly convinced that his proposal would meet with almost universal disapprobation and therefore recommended it to the consideration of a later generation. Defoe was a man of great inventiveness and sound common sense, and many undeniable improvements were suggested in his "*Essay upon Projects*" (1702). He had certainly heard of, and very probably read (although he misquotes the title) Mrs. Astell's "*Serious Proposal*", and it redounds to his credit that he is one of the very few contemporaries of that eccentric lady to do justice to her motives in seriously considering her ideal of a nunnery, instead of making it the object of obscene insinuations like those of which Dr. Swift was guilty in the pages of the *Tatler*. His estimate of the possibilities of women was very considerably in advance of his time, and places him among the most advanced of woman's male advocates. Unlike the essayists, his tone is serious throughout, and the proposal well worth considering, although even Defoe has so far become tainted with the prevailing opinion regarding women as to assume certain sexual propensities which he fears will be in the way of their moral improvement. "I doubt a method proposed by an ingenious lady in a little book called "*Advice to the Ladies*" would be found practicable," he says. "For, saving my respect for the sex, *the levity which is perhaps a little peculiar to them*, at least in their youth, will not bear the restraint,

and I am satisfied nothing but the height of bigotry can keep a nunnery." Here we have the voice of worldly experience and psychological insight protesting against Utopianism. For in women who for ages have lacked the moulding influence of education Nature cannot fail to assert herself, and will ruin the scheme.

On the other hand, his confidence in the improvability of the sex is such as to make him claim for them the right to an education which will bring out their dormant qualities. "I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us as a civilised and a Christian country, that we deny the advantage of learning to our women. We reproach the sex every day with folly and impertinence, which I am confident, had they the advantage of education equal to us, *they would be guilty of less than ourselves.*" That the pioneer should occasionally somewhat overstep the bounds of moderation is surely pardonable. Defoe in his zeal holds the capacities of women to be greater and their senses quicker than those of men.

Nor does he fail to recognise the advantage that will accrue to the female soul from an education which will "polish the rough diamond", and without which its lustre might never appear. The Academy for Women which he proposes, therefore, shall be "different from all sort of religious confinements," and above all, there shall be no vows of celibacy. The ascetic view of finding fault with every innocent enjoyment seems to him as objectionable as the perpetual pursuit of pleasure upon which it was a reaction.

The Academy was to be a sort of public school, supplying women with the advantages of learning "suitable to their genius", without requiring any monastic vows which were sure to be broken. Defoe is inclined to try his women "by the principles of honour and strict virtue", being convinced that the measure of keeping the men effectually away from the college will put an end to all intriguing. According to him, temptation comes with the suggestion of opportunity and all modesty takes its root in custom, "for this alone, when inclinations reign, tho' virtue's fled, will act of vice restrain".

> "If their desires are strong, and nature free,
> Keep from her man and opportunity,
> Else 't will be vain to curb her by restraint;
> But keep the question off, you keep the saint."

Everything should be done to render intriguing dangerous, if not impossible. The building should be of three plain fronts, "that the

eye might at a glance see from one coin to the other, the gardens walled in the same triangular figure, with a large moat and but one entrance." But the restraint would be only relative, for only those were to be admitted into the seclusion of the college who were willing to live there, and even they were not to be confined a moment longer than the same voluntary choice inclined them.

Defoe realised that upon an absolute separation from the opposite sex depended the success of his undertaking. We seem to be listening to Lilia in Tennyson's *Princess* saying: "But I would make it death for any male thing but to peep at us", when Defoe pleads the advisability of an act of parliament making it "felony for any man to enter by force or fraud into the house, or to solicit any woman though it were to marry, while she was in the house." Any woman willing to receive the advances of a suitor, might leave the establishment, whilst those anxious to "discharge themselves of impertinent addresses" would be sure at any time to find a refuge in it.

The plan of instruction is made relative to the natural inclinations of the sex. An important place is to be given to music and dancing, "because they are their darlings", and to foreign languages, particularly French and Italian, "and I would venture the injury of giving a woman more tongues than one." Books are recommended, especially on historical subjects, to make them understand the world, nor are "the graces of speech", and "the necessary air of conversation" forgotten, in which the usual education was so defective.

In the solution he proposes to the problem of female erudition, Defoe was equally effective. He recognises that it will not do to fit all women into a universal harness. Allowance must be made for individuality. "To such whose genius would lead them to it" he would deny no sort of learning. He is even roused to an ecstatic pitch of enthusiasm by the contemplation of the ideal female which his imagination conjures up before his mind's eye. "Without partiality; a woman of sense and manners is the finest and most delicate part of God's creation, the glory of her Maker, and the great instance of his singular regard to man, his darling creature, to whom he gave the best gift either God could bestow or man receive", to which he adds that education may make of any woman "a creature without comparison, whose society is the emblem of sublime enjoyments." God has given to all mankind souls equally capable, and the entire difference between the sexes proceeds "either from accidental differences in the make of their bodies, or from the foolish difference

of education." And Defoe winds up with the bold assertion that all the world are mistaken in their practice about women, "for I cannot think that God Almighty ever made them such delicate and glorious creatures, and furnished them with such charms, so agreeable and so delightful to mankind, with souls capable of the same accomplishments with men, and only to be stewards of our houses, cooks and slaves."

In direct opposition to the opinion of the Dean of St. Patrick's, holding women to be the main cause of their own depravity and endowing them with a very limited share of intelligence rendering them forever inferior to men, stand out the views of at least one individual member of the sex. While fully sharing Swift's disapproval of the actual condition of women, she felt more inclined to follow Defoe in blaming the other half of mankind for refusing them every opportunity to show their possibilities. The tyranny of the male sex aroused the burning indignation of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose feelings found vent both in her voluminous correspondence and in her, mostly occasional, poetry. She was most vehement in her denunciation of the treatment of married women by their husbands, which she made an argument against matrimony, and in favour of the virginal state, which at least ensured to women a certain amount of freedom and leisure. "Wife and servant are the same, but only differ in the name", and accordingly women are exhorted to "shun that wretched state, and all the fawning flatt'rers hate." [1] She did not, like Swift, believe in the moral superiority of man, and called marriage "a lottery, where there is (at the lowest computation) ten thousand blanks to a prize." Being all her life a furious reader, she had in her earliest years imbibed the romantic notions of d'Urfé's *Astrée* and of de Scudéry's long-winded romances of *Cyrus* and *Clélie*, causing her to deeply regret the utter loss of that platonic ideal of gallantry with its tendency to elevate the mind and to instil honourable sentiments which had so charmed her hours of meditation. In spite of the fact that ther passion for literature met with little or no encouragement, and that her own education had been, according to her own statement [2] "one of the worst in the world" — being an exact parallel to that of which the unfortunate Clarissa Harlowe became the much-lamented victim — her erudition was such, that Pope — previous to their quarrel, when he said some very nasty things about her — playfully wondered what punishment might be in store for one who, not

1) *A Caveat to the Fair Sex.*
2) *Letter* to the Countess of Bute, March 6, 1753.

content, like Eve, with a single apple, "had robbed the whole tree".

Her own marriage to Mr. Edward Wortley Montagu was hardly a success. His diplomatic career, however, gave his wife the much wished-for opportunity to cultivate her understanding by means of foreign travel. As a result of her experiences at Constantinople she was enabled on the one hand to furnish the medical science with the means of succesfully combating that most destructive disease : the smallpox, and on the other to enrich literature with a correspondence which bespeaks a profound knowledge of the world, combined with great sagacity and a wonderful discriminating power, and cannot fail to charm even the modern reader with the freshness and variety of its descriptions. Both style and descriptive manner show a pronounced resemblance to Mary Wollstonecraft's "*Letters from Sweden*", written nearly eighty years later. A preface to Lady Mary's Letters, which were not published until her death, was written in 1724 by Mrs. Astell, who certainly did not deserve the description given of her by the first editor of the Letters as "the fair and elegant prefacer", being "a pious, exemplary woman, and a profound scholar, but as far from fair and elegant as any old schoolmaster of her time." [1]) Her friendship for Lady Mary found its origin in the circumstance that she saw in the latter's talents the conclusive evidence of that mental equality of the sexes which she made it her business to demonstrate. "I confess I am malicious enough to desire that the world should see to how much better purpose the Ladies travel than their Lords ; and that, whilst it is surfeited with male travels all in the same tone, and stuffed with the same trifles, a lady has the skill to strike out a new path and to embellish a worn-out subject with variety of fresh and elegant entertainment." That this praise is — at least partly — due to considerations of feminism, appears from the following verses :

> "Let the male authors with an envious eye
> Praise coldly, that they may the more decry ;
> Women (at least I speak the sense of some)
> This little spirit of rivalship o'ercome.
> I read with transport, and with joy I greet
> A genius so sublime, and so complete,
> And gladly lay my laurels at her feet."

Lady Mary on her part wrote an "*Ode to Friendship*", addressed to

1) "*Introductory Anecdotes*" to Lord Wharncliffe's Edition of the Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (Paris, 1837).

Mrs. Mary Astell. She also sympathised with the latter's scheme for the establishment of a convent. She thought that a safe retreat might be preferable to a show of public life. Her friend Lady Stafford once said of her that her true vocation was a monastery, and we have Lady Mary's own evidence where, approving of a project of an English monastery in "*Sir Charles Grandison*", she confesses that it was one of the favourite schemes of her early youth to get herself elected lady-abbess. This intellectual propensity — for what appealed to her most in the scheme was the indefinite leisure to be devoted to studies — pervades all her writings, and throws further light upon her disinclination to the matrimonial state and her recluse habits.

Lady Mary's social career came to a sudden close when in 1739 her declining health made it advisable for her to leave England for the sunny skies of northern Italy, where she remained till the year before her death. To this period belong her chief contributions to the Woman Question, contained in her correspondence with her daughter the Countess of Bute, and giving her views of the position of women, elicited by certain remarks on the education of her little granddaughter. The circumstances under which this correspondence was carried on bear a close resemblance to Mme de Sévigné's when writing to her daughter Mme de Grignan her excellent advice regarding the education of little Pauline de Simiane. From what has already been said it may be readily concluded that the principal of Lady Mary's grievances against the existing system was not that women were not allowed their share of political and social power, — for she felt no difficulty in entrusting the male sex with those duties which would have kept her from her favourite pursuit — but rather that they should be purposely and systematically debarred from studies and kept in ignorance. But she was wise in avoiding all generalisation and recommending the consideration of each individual case by itself and for its own sake, since what might suit one woman might prove a source of misery to another.

When her own daughter had been young, the fact that she was likely to attract the highest offers had made it necessary that she should learn to live in the world, for which very few intellectual qualifications were then needed. But her granddaughter's chances of a brilliant match were considerably less, and so she ought to be taught how to be perfectly easy out of the world, in that retirement which Lady Mary herself preferred to the social state. Thus, a new element is added to the arguments in favour of liberal instruction, which is

to be a pleasure rather than a task, with no more important background than the providing of a substitute for social intercourse to those whose circumstances prevent them from occupying a place in social circles. And it is clearly the mother's task to talk over with her daughter what the latter may have read, that she may not "mistake pert folly for wit and humour, or rhyme for poetry, which are the common errors of young people, and have a train of ill consequences."

The moral education which she recommends for her granddaughter is rather slight, and based chiefly on the negative principle — which we have also found in Fénelon and other French moralists — of keeping the mind occupied as a means of preventing idleness, which is the mother of mischief. Learning, — which modesty would have them carefully conceal, for ignorance is bold, and true knowledge reserved — will tend to make women less deceitful instead of more so, and as the same lessons will form the same characters, there is no reason to "place women in an inferior rank to men."

Lady Mary thus declared her belief in the equality of the sexes, but she has not enough of the social leaven in her to make any definite claim for her sex. She is rather an isolated specimen of womanhood, serving as a proof of the capacities of some exceptional women, than a fighter for female rights. Her intellectual and literary powers were of a critical and satirical rather than a creative nature. That she was among the very first women to possess the critical faculty in an eminent degree, appears from the clever criticism of contemporary fiction with which her correspondence abounds, and which makes her the forerunner of her husband's relative of Bluestocking fame. She was sufficiently independent in her judgment to disagree with the general opinion of Richardson's novels, without being able to remain uninfluenced by his pathos. "I heartily despise him, and eagerly read him, nay, sob over his works in a most scandalous manner." This merely because of the parallel some of the heroine's circumstances afforded to those of her own youth, for neither Miss Howe nor even Clarissa herself found favour in her eyes. She was one of the very few readers of Richardson who saw the faultiness of the moral of both *Pamela* and *Clarissa Harlowe*, considering them "to be two books that will do more general mischief than the works of Lord Rochester." Her sound common sense made her heartily despise any excess of that sensibility which Richardson's works fostered. Her verdict of *Sir Charles Grandison* was even more crushing. "His conduct (towards Clementina) puts me in mind of some ladies

I have known who could never find out a man to be in love with them, let him do or say what he would, till he made a direct attempt, and then they were so surprised, I warrant you ! nor do I approve Sir Charles's offered compromise (as he calls it). There must be a great indifference to religion on both sides, to make so strict a union as marriage tolerable between people of such distinct persuasions. He seems to think women have no souls, by agreeing so easily that his daughters should be educated in bigotry and idolatry."

In her love of learning, and more still in her keen literary judgment Lady Mary foreshadowed the coming of the Bluestockings, whom her total lack of sociability would have forever prevented her from joining.

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## CHAPTER V.

### *Qualified Feminism : The Bluestockings.*

"Feminism", says M. Ascoli, in an article in the "*Revue de Synthèse historique*", "is the mental attitude of those who refuse to admit a natural and necessary inequality between the faculties of the sexes, and, in consequence of this, between their respective rights ; who believe that — within certain limits clearly defined by Nature — women are capable of the same occupations as men, in which they will succeed equally well when, prepared for their task by an adequate education, they will be no longer opposed by the ill-will and the hostile jealousy of the opposite sex ; of those who, eager for the birth of a more extensive liberty and a more liberal justice, hope for the realisation of an ideal which will bring the greatest boon not only to women, but to all humanity."

If the above is a correct and exhaustive definition of feminism, the Bluestockings certainly cannot be called feminists, for they none of them believed that the future of the human race was in any way dependent on a recognised equality between the sexes. This, however, should not be understood as implying that they did nothing to promote the march of feminism, or rather to prepare the national mind for the first symptoms of a more directly feminine movement which were to manifest themselves before the more or less artificial conversations of the Bluestocking côteries had retired

into insignificance before the looming spectre of Revolution, filling the mind with speculations of more direct importance, and arousing the hereditary conservatism which slumbers at the bottom of every true British heart in a common effort to uphold the laws of the country against the revolutionary element, sown broadcast at home, and prevailing with most disastrous consequences abroad. But the contribution of the English salons to feminism in its narrower sense, however important in its consequences, must be described as largely unintentional, and extremely qualified. The very mention of Mary Wollstonecraft's name was enough to arouse indignation and disgust in the bosom of every true "Blue" except Miss Seward, on the joint score of her being considered an extreme feminist, a revolutionary and most of all: an atheist.

The charge of atheism is of the many accusations brought against the author of "*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*" beyond any doubt the most absurd, and where there was so little mutual understanding, it is not astonishing that there should be an utter lack of appreciation between such women as Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft, both of whom were actuated by the noblest motives and whom a closer acquaintance could not have failed to bring nearer together. Of the main contentions in the former's "*Strictures*" a very considerable majority, stripped of their dogmatic spirit of orthodox Christianity, and worded in such a manner as to make them sound as a vindication of inalienable rights and corresponding duties rather than an exhortation to a life of moral virtue, are an exact repetition of the notions put forward in the "*Rights of Women*"; with the contents of which Hannah More was unacquainted. Horace Walpole, the tone of whose letters to "Saint Hannah" is so completely different from his usual scoffing as to suggest a conflict in the writer's mind between irony and genuine admiration, in referring to the Paris massacres, expresses his disgust of "the philosophing serpent", and is pleased to find that his friend has not read her works; to which Hannah replies that she has been "much pestered" to read the "*Rights of Women*", which she evidently never did.

Mary's feminism was of the most comprehensive description. Although very far from atheism, her religious notions, shaken by bitter experience, were not sufficiently strong to support her in what was to her the very cruel struggle for life, the facts of which were, from her earliest infancy, so hideous as to leave her no leisure for the gradual development of social ideas under the regulating influence

of a riper mind, but put her through the hard school of suffering. The problem with which she found herself confronted was an urgent one, calling for immediate solution.

Considerations of a future existence certainly did come at different times to comfort her, but they were to her a remnant of convention and called forth in times of pressure rather than an inherent part of her being. In proportion as the more tangible ideals of the Revolution came to absorb her interest, the hope of salvation became a secondary consideration, which was not to be allowed to interfere with the necessity for correcting present evils and relieving present wants. To her, the problem of the female cause was stern reality which was well worth the devotion of a lifetime. Her energetic mind took in the subject in its entirety and thought it out to the minutest details, suggesting radical changes without stopping to consider their feasibility, and impressing us with the almost masculine width of its range.

How insipid and uninteresting compared to her radicalism are the attempts at a partial reform of a Hannah More, the very limitations of which bring out more clearly the utter want of breadth, the narrow conventionality which hampered the growth of the ideal! To her and to her associates the Woman Question had a much narrower range, and remained limited to the problem of moral improvement. Hannah More, indeed, had no cause to complain of scornful treatment at the hands of men, and in her circle, next to one or two of the greatest men of the day, women were the ruling influence. Of the lower classes and their struggles her early youth had taught her little or nothing, and her sympathy with the poor and humble was awakened in the course of the long and bitter struggle of conventionalism against radicalism, in which, viewing the matter broadly, she ranged herself among the defenders of a doubtful cause. It gave her a better insight into the social conditions of England, and no doubt she grew to realise that the great problem of humanity had reached an acute stage, and that even in her own cherished country there were many wrongs to be righted. From that time she became more and more of a social reformer, but the pressing need of the case was forever mitigated by considerations of Eternity. To her, who pinned her faith on the promise of life everlasting, the most glaring pictures of human misery faded before the beacon-light of faith and trust. She never found it difficult to be reconciled to the preponderance of evil, for she looked upon it "as making part of the dispensations of God", who in his supreme wisdom meant this world for a scene of discipline, not of remuneration.

Hence the utter incompatibility of the orthodox view with the doctrine of perfectibility, and the hostile attitude of the Bluestocking ladies towards those of the new faith, by which this world was looked upon as all-in-all, and in which want and misery were considered as evils arising solely from the defects of human governments. "Whatever is, is right", was Hannah More's guiding principle, and to remove that inequality which in her eyes was a portion of God's great scheme seemed to her rebelling against God's own decree. She relieved human misery where she could, from a sense of Christian duty and propriety, and by establishing schools tried to rouse the poor to a sense of moral duty, teaching them to be satisfied in the position in which it had pleased God to place them and to live in the hope of Eternity. The practice of that humility which is among the first duties of a Christian forbade any attempt at rising in the social scale. Likewise, in the case of woman, there was to her only one great and leading circumstance that raised her importance, and might to a certain extent establish her equality: "Christianity had exalted them to true and undisputed dignity; in Christ Jezus, as there is neither rich nor poor, bond nor free, so there is neither male nor female. In the view of that immortality which is brought to light by the Gospel, she has no superior. Women, to borrow the idea of an excellent prelate, make up one half of the human race, equally with men redeemed by the blood of Christ." All other forms of equality do not seen to her worth fighting for.

This view of Hannah More's was fully shared by those among the Bluestockings who took a more direct interest in social questions: Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Chapone and Mrs. Carter. In their opinions about social inequality they were guided by the conservatism of dogmatic faith, as their views of the position of women derived colour from notions of propriety. They rejoiced with the rest of the nation at the news of the fall of the Bastille, which to every true John Bull had become the symbol of French slavery and which served as an opportunity to assert his own superiority and praise that perfect liberty which he imagined to be the privilege of every individual Briton — and no doubt thought themselves extremely enlightened in doing so. But at the first reports of bloodshed and lawlessness propriety suggested that they had suffered themselves by their all-embracing love of humanity to be betrayed into feelings which might be thought distinctly improper, or be translated into a want of patriotic feeling. They chose to be Englishwomen rather than

cosmopolitans. This choice was made the easier for them as they had come to regard France as the chief bulwark of irreligion. Hannah More complains (1799) that "that cold compound of irony, irreligion, selfishness and sneer, which make up what the French (*from whom we borrow the thing as well as the word*) so well express by the term *persiflage*, has of late years made an incredible progress in blasting the opening buds of piety in young persons of fashion." [1]) When the immediate danger of revolution in England was over, some Bluestockings — in particular Mrs. Montagu, Hannah More and Mrs. Carter — responded to the appeal of suffering humanity, in a narrow compass, to the best of their ability, and in the case of the second with highly creditable zeal and devotion, but they did not, like Mary Wollstonecraft, rise to the occasion, forego public praise and suffer martyrdom for the cause of humanity.

The Bluestockings, therefore, cannot be ranked as militant feminists. They were content with the position of dependence which the authority of the Bible assigns to women. It is true that even from among their circle an occasional protest was heard against the deliberate subjection of the female sex. The learned Mrs. Carter once complained to her friend Archbishop Secker of the partiality of the male translator of the Bible, who in rendering the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians had translated the same verb in different ways so as to bring out what he thought ought to be the relations between husband and wife, writing that he was not to "put away" his wife, and that she was not to "leave" him; and the archbishop, who began by contradicting her, on referring to the Bible was forced to acknowledge that she was right. On the whole, however, the literary remains of the Bluestockings demonstrate pretty clearly that their confidence in female equivalence was not great. Mrs. Chapone, in her letters, mostly adheres to the creed of male superiority. She tries, however, to effect a compromise. Man, the appointed ruler and head, is undoubtedly woman's superior, but a woman "should choose for her husband one whom she can heartily and willingly acknowledge her superior, and whose understanding and judgment she can prefer to her own". This sounds most revolutionary at a time when women, as a rule, were not allowed to choose their own husbands. It is interesting to note that Miss Hester Mulso did, and made a love-match with Mr. Chapone, whom she soon after lost through death. She goes on

[1]) *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, p. 10.

to say that the husband should have "such an opinion of his wife's understanding, principles and integrity of heart, as will induce him to exalt her to the rank of his first and dearest friend", and concludes: "I believe it necessary that all such inequality and subjection as must check and refrain that unbounded confidence and frankness which are the essence of friendship, be laid aside or suffered to sleep". A qualified superiority, therefore, upon which the lord and master is supposed not to presume.

Among the correspondence of Mrs. Montagu, the "Queen of the Blues", published "by her great-great niece" Miss E. J. Climenson, is a letter to her devoted friend and admirer the Earl of Bath on the subject of her archenemy Voltaire's tragedy of "*Tancred*", in which she finds fault with the character of Aménaide for not following virtue as by law established, but despising forms and following sentiment, "a dangerous guide". This is what we should expect from a Bluestocking leader. She continues: "*Designed by nature to act but a second part*, it is a woman's duty to obey rules; she is not to make or redress them". Hannah More also admits the male superiority in a chapter on conversation in her "*Strictures*", where she follows Swift and Mrs. Barbauld in suggesting that men shall concur in the education of the female sex by allowing them the humble part of interested listeners to their superior conversation. "It is to be regretted", she says, "that many men, even of distinguished sense and learning, are too apt to consider the society of ladies as a scene in which they are rather to rest their understandings than to exercise them; while ladies, in return, are too much addicted to make their court by lending themselves to this spirit of trifling: they often avoid making use of what abilities they have, and affect to talk below their natural and acquired powers of mind, considering it as a tacit and welcome flattery to the understanding of men to renounce the exercise of their own" [1]). The last part of this statement strikes a higher note in its denunciation of the pernicious system of "relativity". Mrs. Carter also refers somewhere in her correspondence to the indignity of ladies and gentlemen at various assemblies being kept separated, as if the former were disqualified by the shortcomings of their sex from listening to the improving conversation of the latter.

In conclusion it may be stated that the Bluestocking assemblies

[1]) *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, p. 245.

in all probability arose from an ardent wish on the part of some intellectual ladies to intermingle with the conversation of the members of Dr. Johnson's club the charms of their own. One of the Literary Clubbists informs us that a certain lady, whom he does not name, but describes as distinguished by her beauty and taste for literature, used to invite them to dinner and share in the conversation. He may have meant Miss Reynolds, Sir Joshua's sister, who wrote a much praised "*Essay on Taste*", and whose salon was among the first where Wits and Bluestockings learnt to appreciate each other's society. Boswell, in his "*Life of Johnson*" says: "It was much the fashion for several ladies to have evening assemblies, where the fair sex might participate in conversation with literary and ingenious men, *animated by a desire to please*". Although the duty of receiving the guests and so placing them as to ensure animated discussions fell to the share of the women, yet few of them were bold enough to let themselves be heard in the presence of the literary dictator, whose oracular speeches were delivered with pompous assurance and listened to and taken in with becoming deference and humility. Dr. Johnson made and marred the literary and conversational reputations of his bevy of female admirers; Fanny Burney owed her success as a Bluestocking principally to his praise of "*Evelina*", as Hannah did hers — next to the kind protection of Garrick — to his unstinted eulogy of her "*Bas Bleu*" poem. Johnson had said that "there was no name in poetry that might not be glad to own it." But after Johnson's death there came a radical change, and in the absence of a male dictator to occupy the vacant throne, the female element predominated more and more. Especially Mrs. Montagu "queened it" over her satellites, both male and female, and of all the Bluestocking hostesses who vied for supremacy she came nearest to justifying the charge of pedantry.

The question whether the Bluestocking societies were either directly or indirectly an imitation of the older French salons must be answered with some degree of circumspection. That the influence of the latter was considerable may be taken for granted, and the direct points of contact were numerous. Horace Walpole in particular was an intimate of both, David Hume frequented several Paris salons and Mme du Bocage, Mme de Genlis and Mme de Staël — the last two in the year of their exile from France — were repeatedly seen in blue society. It is to the pen of the first that we owe one of the most vivid descriptions of Mrs. Montagu's convivial meetings.

If we moreover consider that French interest in England which is a prominent feature of 18th century society and the close relations between the two countries, we do not wonder that a parallel movement to that of the French salon should have sprung up. And yet the Bluestocking assemblies had a distinct individuality of their own; inferior to their French rivals in some respects, they were superior to them in others. Most critics of the time agree in asserting their inferiority, which is a natural circumstance in view of the fact that they considered them as a literary and conversational movement, in which the chief aim was literary taste and polished, witty conversation. Their estimate never went beyond these limits to consider the influence exercised by these côteries upon society in general. And it is when throwing into the scale the moral improvement, especially among women, which was the result of the efforts of the Bluestocking ladies, that we realise that although different, they were not necessarily inferior to their French rivals.

Wraxall in his "*Historical Memoirs*" opines that "neither in the period of its duration, nor in the number, merit or intellectual eminence of the principal members, could the English society be held upon any parity with that of France." He might have added with equal truth that the average Frenchwoman of the cultivated class is distinguished from her English sister by greater keenness of wit and by a greater brilliance of conversation. The chief talents of the French are of the mind, "de l'esprit", and are shown off to the best advantage, those of the English are rather of the heart and are not flaunted in public. English society, in the matter of outside splendour and brilliance, has always been completely overshadowed by the greater expansiveness of the French. The Bluestocking hostesses were upon the whole less brilliant specimens of female magnificence, but they were undoubtedly far better women. For the light-hearted gallantry practised in the French salons they substituted warm and generous friendship, which considerations of envy only very rarely disturbed. The Bluestocking atmosphere was purer, allowing one to breathe more comfortably than in some French salon where intrigue ruled the hour. The women were like the men, lacking in that "finesse" in which the French excelled, but kind and considerate, and upon the whole quicker to praise than to find fault. Hannah More realised this when singing the praises of the Blues in her "*Bas Bleu*" poem. She describes the members of the French assemblies as brilliant and witty, but lacking common sense and simplicity. Her verdict would

have been more correct if for the Hôtel de Rambouillet, against which her disapprobation is directed, she had substituted the later salons of the decline, where indeed a mistaken "précioisité" prevailed and "where point, and turn, and équivoque distorted every word they spoke". For indeed the parallelism with the salon of the 17th century is far more marked than with that of the 18th. The evolution of both French and English polite literary society furnishes a strong argument in favour of Rousseau's theory that "everything degenerates in the hands of man" — by which he meant "humanity" — for after a short spell of glory both degenerated sadly. In both pedantry supplanted wit, and Molière's "*Femmes Savantes*" might have found its counterpart — though probably not its equivalent — in Fanny Burney's play of "*The Witlings*", which the unfavourable criticism of her friends induced her to destroy. The history of Bluestocking pedantry is a repetition of what took place in French society with the exception that to the Bluestocking society of England no second blossoming was granted by the chilling blasts of Revolution. Pedantry, that archenemy of Wit, robbed it of all its charm, leaving naked Learning, than which nothing can be less sociable. Fanny Burney signalled its approach, warned against it, and ended by joining in the general homage.

There can be no doubt that the French salons occupy the more important place in the history of 18th century thought. No daring philosophical schemes were hatched under the auspices of the Bluestockings, and if their conversation showed the influence of the rationalist spirit, their rationalism was not made subservient to projects of a revolutionary nature, but made to support with its evidence the long-established truth of orthodox religion. Mrs. Chapone in her "*Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*" warns her niece that Reason, which may help us to discover some of the great laws of morality, is yet liable to error. The sending of God's son therefore is to be looked upon as a demonstration or revelation of the evidences of the Christian religion, by which we become convinced *on rational grounds* of its divine authority. Here, as in the matter of sexual precedence, Mrs. Chapone loved a compromise between the head and the heart. The company at Mrs. Vesey's is described as a good "rational society" by Hannah More, who herself rather affected a "comfortable, rational day". Where politics are discussed, the door is opened wide to intrigue, and party-feelings will prevail. Politics had been the ruin of many a periodical attempt and their

exclusion at the Bluestocking assemblies left the field to literary conversation. Philanthropy, or active benevolence, was practised instead, and the light moralising tendencies of the *Spectator* enlistened the same sympathy among the Bluestockings which the sterner moral code of Port Royal awakened in the heart of the more serious Hannah.

Upon the whole the Bluestockings were not, like their French rivals, recruited from the aristocracy. They belonged to the middle-class, to whom the 18th century was a time of great financial prosperity. Mrs. Montagu's wealth was considerable, and she made a liberal use of it not only in philanthropy, but also in encouraging needy authors, which made Hannah More refer to her as "the female Maecenas of Hill Street" [1]). They were mostly the daughters of clergymen and schoolmasters, who in early youth acquired that taste for learning which their fathers or near relations were able to gratify, and that serious cast of mind which never forsook some of them and fitted them to be religious moralists.

The tone of their conversation and writings was a distinct improvement upon that of the ladies of the preceding generation, of whom it was said that those who — like Mrs. Aphra Behn and Mrs. de la Rivière Manley — excelled in wit, failed signally in chastity. The love of scandal which had been their chief characteristic, and which Sheridan justly satirised, was an object of scorn to the Bluestockings, who were as careful to preserve the reputation of others as they were of their own. That some of them occasionally went too far in constituting themselves the mentors of others who were fully able to take care of themselves, is an "amiable weakness" which may be readily forgiven. Thus, for instance, Mrs. Thrale's second marriage with the Italian vocalist Signor Piozzi aroused a good deal of unfavourable comment, brought about an indirect rupture with Fanny Burney and partly caused her withdrawal from the Bluestocking circles. The same exaggerated notions, arising partly from hatred of the Encyclopedian spirit of revolutionism embodied in the much-reviled Rousseau, occur in Mrs. Delany's "*Essay on Propriety*" and in her extremely voluminous correspondence. Mrs. Chapone's *Letters* insist on a proper regard to reputation as one of the most desirable qualities in a friend. She emphatically distinguished between love of reputation, which is nothing but discretion, and undue regard of

[1]) See W. Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, p. 62.

opinion, which is only vanity. Here her views coincided with Mary Wollstonecraft's, who had pointed out the error of wanting to make opinion "the high throne of Virtue" to women in Rousseau's *Emile*, but who did not make Mrs. Chapone's distinction. In the behaviour of young women towards gentlemen, the latter says, great delicacy is required, "yet women oftener err from too great a consciousness of the supposed views of men, than from inattention to those views, or want of caution against them." She therefore agreed that the "desire to please" should be kept under a certain amount of restriction.

All the Bluestockings' actions arose from a strong sense of duty, which the majority of French hostesses — with the emphatic exception of Mme de Lambert — sadly lacked. One of their deliberate aims was the substition of conversation "à la française" for cards. The first determined attack upon the greatest social curse of the age was made by Mrs. Chapone, — then Miss Mulso — in collaboration with Johnson in N°. 10 of the *Rambler* in the year 1750. She wrote to Johnson in his capacity of censor of manners, informing him that she, "Lady Racket", intended to have "cards at her house every Sunday". She, of course, intended that Johnson should seize the opportunity to attack gambling and thus range himself openly on the side of the intellectual ladies who were in open revolt against the practice. Johnson replied that even at the most brilliant of card-tables he had always thought his visit lost, "for I could know nothing of the company but their clothes and their faces." Their complete absorption in the vicissitudes of the game, their exulting triumph when successful, and their flush of rage at defeat or at "the unskilful or unlucky play of a partner" so disgusted him that the soon retired. "They were too trifling for me when I was grave, and too dull when I was cheerful". Mrs. Carter, who did not object to taking an occasional hand at whist or quadrille, was vehement in her condemnation of faro, which she hoped Horace Walpole on getting into the House would succeed in putting down. Hannah More's "*Bas Bleu*" further endorses the statement that the substitution of conversation for cards was one of the objects of Bluestockingism. The introduction states its origin and character. The ladies at Mrs. Vesey's, Mrs. Montagu's and Mrs. Boscawen's, to mention the three hostesses to whom according to their chronicler Hannah More "the triple crown divided fell", although in the opinion of others Mrs. Thrale and Mrs. Ord were candidates for Mrs. Boscawen's place — assembled "for the sole

purpose of conversation, and were different in no respect from other parties, but that the company did *not* play at cards." It was there that Hannah More found the Rambouillet-ideal realised of learning without pedantry, good taste without affectation, and conversation without calumny, levity or any censurable error.

The attacks directed against whist, "that desolating Hun", and quadrille, "that Vandal of colloquial wit", were made not so much on the score of their devastating influence on the moral character as of their exclusion of conversation. It should be remembered, however, that Hannah More wrote her "*Bas Bleu*" in the years before the desire to effect moral reforms got the better of the natural vanity of displaying her considerable intellectual talents.

Conversation thus became in itself a pursuit, almost a cult, the purpose of which was to "mend the taste and form the mind". The record of what was said by the most prominent male and female wits at the Bluestocking gatherings was kept with a minuteness which is characteristic of the time in the endless memoirs and the voluminous correspondence in which every literary lady indulged, and upon which she lavished her talents as an author. Immeasurably the best is Fanny Burney's diary, with its clever and vivid sidelights upon gatherings in which she herself as the successful author of *Evelina*, and the protégée of Johnson, was lionised, although she never became a Bluestocking in the full sense of the word, her temperament being far too sprightly and volatile, and the language of her pen too gushing to suit the notions of propriety of some ladies, whom she further offended by her marriage to a French refugee and by the freedom with which she published details that were not meant for the general ear.

The constellation in the Bluestocking circles differed somewhat from French society, where the hostess received in her drawingroom a number of prominent men-of-letters, scientists, diplomatists, artists and philosophers, the female element being represented by herself, and only a very few privileged friends. At the English assemblies the majority were ladies, and although some members of the Literary Club, Johnson's satellites, were regular frequenters, the female element predominated. Boswell, Johnson's biographer, the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, the politicians Fox and Burke — before the stirring political events that drew them apart, — the historian Gibbon, the poet Goldsmith, the actor Garrick and the author Lyttleton — Mrs. Montagu's friend and collaborator in the "*Dialogues of the*

*Dead*" — alike delighted in Bluestocking society and by their conversation helped in that diffusion of high principles which to Mrs. Chapone in her "*Essay on Conversation*" seemed more important than the French object of sharpening the wit. In her "*Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*" she says that conversation must be cultivated "by the mutual communication of whatever may conduce to the improvement or innocent entertainment of each other."

The literature which was the direct outcome of Bluestockingism is far slighter in bulk than the poetical effusions called forth by the spirit of gallantry which dominated the early French salons. There was between the ladies and gentlemen of the English circles rather less love-making and rather more mutual esteem. There was hardly any of that complimentary occasional poetry of the lighter kind in which the love-sick French swains of the Montausier type had found relief. One of the rare instances of verse-making at an assembly occurred in Mrs. — afterwards Lady — Miller's provincial drawing-room at Batheaston, where, in imitation of a French custom, each of the assembled guests deposited his or her poetry in an antique vase, to be read aloud and judged. That this "puppet-show Parnassus [1])" called forth the ridicule of Walpole and Johnson proves sufficiently that emulation of this kind was not regarded with sympathy among Bluestockings and their wellwishers.

It is difficult to say whether the Bluestockings' contribution to the increase of female importance and influence rivalled that of the French societies, but we undeniably find, that in the latter half of the 18th century the popular verdict regarding women is undergoing a distinct change. Instead of the scornful blame to which Pope, Swift and Chesterfield have made us accustomed we actually find women recognised as an influence in literature by no less a critic than the great Doctor himself. Madame d'Arblay's *Diary* relates how — in 1799 — Johnson once talked to Mrs. Thrale and Sir Philip Jennings about "the amazing progress made of late years in literature by the women." He said he himself was astonished at it, and told them he well remembered when a woman who could spell a common letter was regarded as all-accomplished; but now they vied with the men in everything. The same *Diary* makes mention (in 1782) of the verses published by the author's father — Dr. Burney — in the *Herald*, making women the object of praise instead of

[1]) Walpole.

blame and ridicule. The composition was entitled "*Advice to the Herald*", published anonymously, and ascribed to Sir W. W. Pepys, until in 1822 a M. S. copy was found among Dr. Burney's papers. They exhort the paper not only to proclaim the shame of woman, but to also "record in story such as shine their sex's glory". Hannah More's "pathetic pen", Mrs. Carter's "piety and learning", Fanny Burney's "quick discerning" are praised; and special places are retained for Mrs. Chapone, "high-bred, elegant Mrs. Boscawen"; Lady Lucan, Mrs. Leveson Gower, Mrs. Greville, Lady Crewe and "fertile-minded" Mrs. Montagu.

David Garrick, Hannah More's faithful friend and supporter, in referring to the success of her ballad entitled "*Sir Eldred of the Bower*", followed by another poem called "*The Bleeding Rock*", playfully represents the male sex as mortified by female success and makes Apollo the author. And in Hoole's "*Aurelia, or the Contest*", likewise referred to in Fanny Burney's *Diary*, the example of "the wiser females" is glanced at to counterbalance female folly. All which examples tend to show that public opinion regarding women was undergoing a slow process of change. Now that women themselves had taken their moral improvement in hand, the male authors felt that they could again indulge in some measure of praise.

On the other hand, women had become sufficiently conscious of the moral shortcomings of the opposite sex, to take an occasional share in their reclamation and point out the error of their ways. When, after long circulating in manuscript, the "*Bas Bleu*" poem was at last published, it was accompanied by another entitled "*Florio*", describing the fopperies and the utter worthlessness of a typical "maccaroni" or young man of fashion, a criticism which none of us would think of calling undeserved.

The department of literature in which women were qualified to shine *par excellence* was the novel. Richardson's novels had succeeded marvellously in awakening interest in the workings of the female heart, and analysis of the female character to its minutest details was what the reading public had grown to expect. This was a field in which women have since abundantly proved themselves in many ways the equals of men, and the story of the universal praise with which "*Evelina*" was welcomed, and the author's mingled pride in her achievement and bashfulness, arising out of the fear that she might be thought lacking in modesty, is among the most amusing parts of her diary. Unfortunately, for all her keenness of perception and

fine sense of humour, there was about her character a certain want of depth, which became more apparent as she grew older. But she certainly paved the way for the later female novelists, and particularly for Jane Austen.

Not the least among the Bluestockings' merits was the fact that by the example some of them gave they accustomed the British public to seeing females engaged in different occupations which before had been the exclusive work of men. Where ladies of such a strong sense of propriety did not shrink from appearing before the public as authors, and even pseudonyms were often thought unnecessary, the domain of literature ceased to be the exclusive property of men. Strangely enough, the notion that female knowledge should be carefully concealed, originating in Molière's *Femmes Savantes* and prevailing all through the 17th and 18th centuries in both literatures until Mary Wollstonecraft openly disregarded it, was implicitly obeyed by the Bluestockings.

Not all the Bluestocking ladies were authors; Mrs. Vesey for instance, probably the most loveable among the hostesses, who understood better than any of her rivals the art of making her guests comfortable, has left us no literary legacy. Of the others, Mrs. Delany and Mrs. Boscawen concentrated their literary energies chiefly upon their correspondence, while Mrs. Carter's clever translation of Epictetus which elicited the unstinted praise of Mr. Long, a later translator, who repeatedly, when in doubt, consulted her text, is of no importance to her sex. The principal literary contributions to the subject of feminism were made by three Bluestockings: Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Chapone and Mrs. Hannah More, the nature of whose contributions corresponds closely with their respective characters.

The natural bias of Elizabeth Robinson's character was strengthened by the circumstances of her education. In her early youth she was often at Cambridge, where her grandmother's second husband, Dr. Conyers Middleton, took great delight in her keenness of understanding, and often kept her in the room while he was conversing with his visitors, among whom were the greatest philosophers and scholars of the day. Her father was also amused at the child's precocity and they used to have frequent "brain cudgellings", until he became painfully aware that he was no longer a match for his clever daughter. She was a furious letter-writer, which occupation, if it sharpened her wit, also developed in her that insatiable intellectual vanity which afterwards became her ruling passion, distinguished her as a

Bluestocking from her more modest rivals and prevented her from being as universally liked as a Mrs. Vesey. Her biographer Mr. Huchon says that "she was all mind, if not all soul", and was more respected than loved. Sentimentality was not among her weaknesses, her sound practical sense dictated both to herself and to others. She strongly opposed the love-match which her ward Miss Dorothea Gregory — one of the daughters to whom the well-known physician of that name addressed his legacy of advice — asked her permission to make, and the ubiquitous Fanny Burney writes that Mrs. Montagu once asked her, "if she should write a play, to let her know of it", which vexed Fanny's "second Daddy", Mr. Crisp, as it "implied interference". Her own marriage (1742) was purely a "marriage de raison", the husband being considerably older, and a man of great wealth. Mrs. Chapone afterwards called her with reason "an ignoramus in love", which did not in this case prevent the marriage from being fairly happy.

Neither was Mrs. Montagu free from affectation. Much-praised simplicity and humility were not among her virtues, and no flattery seems to have been too gross for her to accept. Lady Louisa Stuart — Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's granddaughter, to whom we are indebted for some humorous pictures of Bluestocking society — describes her as thoroughly satisfied with herself. Her speech is described as affected, although ready wit can scarcely be denied her. Her reply on being informed that Voltaire, Shakespeare's translator, had boasted of having been the first Frenchman to find "quelques perles dans son fumier": "c'est donc un fumier qui a fertilisé une terre bien ingrate" is a good specimen both of her proficiency in the French language and of her quickness of repartee. However, she often descended from the heights of rhetoric, and her affectation of speech seems to have been a weakness into which she was occasionally betrayed by a momentary lapse of her fine judgment. Speaking of Mr. Gray she once said: "I think he is the first poet of my age; but if he comes to my fireside, I will teach him not only to speak prose, but to talk nonsense, if occasion be."

She loved to make a display of her learning, and Johnson said of her that "she diffused more knowledge in her conversation than any women he knew." At the same time she criticised others freely, which procured her many enemies. Mr. Crisp thought her "a vain, empty, conceited pretender, and little else"; Wraxall judged that "there was nothing feminine about her"; and an essay by Cumber-

land in the *Observer* of 1785 describes the "Feast of Reason" at Mrs. Montagu's house in Portman Square, where the lady herself is satirised under the name of "Vanessa". It describes her as stimulated to charity, affability and hospitality exclusively by the dictates of inordinate vanity, and even accuses her of bribing her critics: "Authors were fee'd for dedications, and players patronised on benefit nights".

Her charity was, indeed, of a condescending kind. Thus her annual feast to the chimney-sweeps on May day rather smacks of the doctrine of Good Works pointing the way to Salvation, and to the working people in her coal-mines she was a dutiful but immeasurably superior patroness. In a few isolated cases, however, there were flashes of real kindness. She gave unstinted financial support to Mrs. Williams, the blind poetess whose lot had aroused Johnson's compassion, and her letter of condolence to Mrs. Delany on the occasion of the death of their mutual friend the Duchess of Portland has the genuine ring of grief and sympathy. It tries to find solace in considerations of eternity. Mrs. Montagu's religious views were strict, and religious worship was a serious matter with her. However, her strong individuality would not suffer her to bow her intellect before that of any man. Beyond the admitted fact that "God is the loving father of all", she has only Hope, but no definite knowledge of the certainty of a future state.

Such was the character of the lady whom Johnson called "Queen of the Blues", and Fanny Burney "our sex 's glory". The incident which had a determining influence on her further life was the death of her only child. Grief of that kind may be to some extent drowned in religion or in social intercourse, and Mrs. Montagu tried both. She emphatically believed in the social state as productive of good through the friction of minds. Thus it came about that in the middle of the century — the exact date is nowhere given, which makes it difficult to decide whether Mrs. Montagu, or Mrs. Vesey, or Miss Frances Reynolds had the right to consider herself the first Blue-stocking hostess, — Mrs. Montagu opened her salon in Hill Street, where she entertained a great number of guests of the most widely different description, her rooms being often filled from eleven in the morning till eleven at night.

The best descriptions of Mrs. Montagu's parties are to be found in Hannah More's correspondence and in Mme du Bocage's "*Letters on England, Holland and Italy.*" The latter visited England at a time when Mrs. Montagu's breakfasts were all the fashion, served "in

a closet lined with painted paper of Pekin and furnished with the choicest movables of China", the so-called Chinese Room, recalling the splendours of the "Chambre bleue" of the marquise de Rambouillet. It was probably at Mrs. Montagu's and at Mrs. Thrale's that Dr. Johnson chiefly indulged in his tea-orgies, and Mme Du Bocage describes his hostess as pouring out her delicious tea, attired in a white apron and a large straw hat. On the whole the English ladies paid more attention to gastric delights than their French sisters, and in Mrs. Montagu's case her well-provided table often relieved her from the wearisome duty of keeping up the flow of conversation. In this lay the characteristic difference between Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Vesey. The latter wanted her guests to forget her and to consult their own inclinations in the forming of groups of conversation, contenting herself with listening to her literary lions ; Mrs. Montagu on the other hand, to quote Fanny Burney, "cared not a fig, as long as she spoke herself". That her intellectual queenship involved the duty of maintaining conversation at a high pitch seems to have considerably worried her upon occasions.

The Bluestocking hostesses kept a great variety of hours. In the last decades of the century late teas were in vogue, but the usual entertainments were breakfasts and dinners, in which there was a great variety. We read of Mrs. Garrick's dinner parties to a select company of eight chosen friends, among whom Hannah More was proud to find herself, and according to Horace Walpole Mrs. Montagu's breakfasts at her house in Portman Square sometimes included seven hundred guests, from royalty downwards. To this magnificent abode she removed in 1781, six years after the death of her husband. She spared no cost in fitting it up in the most gorgeous fashion, and although Walpole thought her decorations in good taste, one cannot help feeling doubts as to the room with the feather hangings of which Cowper wrote in 1788 that "the birds put off their every hue, to dress a room for Montagu." The famous "Room of the Cupidons" made her a little ridiculous in the eyes of the more sober-minded ladies, one of whom (Mrs. Delany) in a letter refers somewhat spitefully to "her age".

There are no references to any of Mrs. Montagu's parties taking place out of doors, but some of the minor hostesses would sometimes send out invitations to tea, followed by a walk in the Park or fields. This custom was perhaps an imitation of the habits prevailing among Rambouillet-circles. Neither do we find anywhere mention of stated

days, such as were kept by the French hostesses, although Sundays were objected to by some of the more orthodox.

The greater artificiality of arrangement at the Bluestocking assemblies appears from the pains taken by the hostess to so place her guests as to ensure a free flow of wit. In connection with Mrs. Montagu, reports are contradictory. Hannah More's correspondence informs us that the company used to split up into little groups of five or six; Fanny Burney on the contrary relates how the guests were seated in a semi-circle round the fire. Here again, Mrs. Vesey followed her individual inclinations, for the Bas-Bleu poem tells us how her "potent ward the circle broke", insisting on an easy informality in the grouping of her guests. Mrs. Ord seems to have preferred the later method of drawing chairs round a table in the centre.

Mrs. Montagu's early correspondence is full of wit and humour, and displays so much discrimination that we feel surprised the writer did not make her mark later in life as a novelist. The critical faculty she possessed in so eminent a degree fitted her for satire, the object being naturally contemporary society. In a letter, written when she was twenty, she gives a vivid description of fashionable life at Bath, ridiculing the emptiness of daily conversation and signalising the general depravity of morals. "How d'ye do?" prevails in the morning, and "What's trumps?" at night; the ladies' only topic is diseases, and the men are all bad. "There is not one good, no not one." She likewise freely vented her ridicule of overdone fashions, and descriptions like the following are by no means rare. "Lady P. and her two daughters make a very remarkable figure, and will ruin the poor mad woman of Tunbridge by out-doing her in dress. Such hats, capuchins, and short sacks as were never seen! One of the ladies looked like a state-bed running upon castors. She had robbed the valance and tester of a bed for a trimming."

Although her satire is chiefly directed against her own sex, she strongly protested against the opinion that women were morally inferior to men, whose insincere flattery was largely responsible for female frivolity.

One of her most constant friends and Platonic admirers was Mr. (afterwards Lord) Lyttleton, her vindication of whose memory against Dr. Johnson in later years led to the most famous of Bluestocking quarrels. In 1760, Lyttleton published his "*Dialogues of the Dead*" — referred to rather unkindly by Walpole as the "Dead

Dialogues". The preface says that after the dialogues of Lucan, Fénelon and Fontenelle, English literature can boast only the learned dialogues of one Mr. Hurde, who takes living persons for his characters. The author proposes to take his cue from the history of all times and nations, opposing them to or comparing them with each other, "which is, perhaps, one of the most agreeable methods that can be employed of conveying to the mind any critical, moral or political observations". Needless to say, the dead are supposed to know all that has taken place since their decease.

Mr. Lyttelton goes on to say that the last three dialogues are by a different hand. "If the friend who favoured me with them should write any more, I shall think the public owes me a great obligation, for having excited a genius so capable of uniting delight with instruction, and giving to knowledge and virtue those graces which the wit of the age has too often employed all its skill to bestow upon folly and vice."

The above sufficiently denotes the character of the dialogues in which Mrs. Montagu — for the "different hand" was hers — had every opportunity to display her satirical vein. The numbers 27 and 28, of which the former satirises fashionable conduct and the latter the literature of gallantry, are illustrative of her opinions of contemporary female character. The characters of N°. 27 are Mercury and a Modern Fine Lady, whose name is Mrs. Modish. The god comes to fetch her to the nether world, but she begs to be excused : "I am engaged, absolutely engaged". Mercury thinks she is referring to her duties to her husband and children, but he is quickly disillusioned. "Look on my chimneypiece, and you will see I was engaged to the play on Mondays, balls on Tuesdays, the Opera on Saturdays, and to card-assemblies the rest of the week, for two months to come ; and it would be the rudest thing in the world not to keep my appointments. If you will stay with me till the summer season, I will wait on you with all my heart. Perhaps the Elysian Fields may be less detestable than the country in our world. Pray have you a fine Vauxhall and Ranelagh ? I think I should not dislike drinking the Lethe waters when you have a full season." When Mercury objects that she has made pleasure the only object in her life, she replies that she has indeed made diversion her chief business, but has got no real pleasure out of it. For late hours and fatigue have given her the vapours and spoiled the natural cheerfulness of her temper. Her ambition to be thought "du bon ton" (which Mrs. Montagu explains

in a note is French cant for the fashionable air of conversation and manners) has ruled her conduct. When asked by Mercury to define the term, Mrs. Modish is somewhat perplexed. "It is — I can never tell you what it is ; but I will try to tell you what it is not. In conversation it is not wit, in manners it is not politeness, in behaviour it is not address ; but it is a little like them all. It can only belong to people of a certain rank ; who live in a certain manner, with certain persons, who have not certain virtues, and who have certain vices, and who inhabit a certain part of the town. Like a place by courtesy, it gets a higher rank than the person can claim, but which those who have a legal title to precedency dare not dispute for fear of being thought not to understand the rules of politeness."

Mercury finds fault with her for sacrificing all her real interests and duties to so arbitrary a thing as "bon ton". She asks him what he would have had her do ? To which Mercury replies that her real business consisted in promoting her husband's happiness and devoting herself to the education of her children. It appears that their religion, sentiments and manners were to be learnt from a dancing-master, a music-master and a French governess. The result will be "wives without conjugal affection and mothers without maternal care." Mercury's final advice to the lady is to "remain on this side the Styx", and to wander about without end or aim, to look into the Elysian Fields, but never attempt to enter them, lest Minos should push her into Tartarus, "for duties neglected may bring on a sentence not much less severe than crimes committed."

The characters of the next dialogue are Plutarch, Charon and a modern bookseller. It contains a pointed satire on literary taste. It appears that the works of Plutarch do not command any sale whatever except to "a few pedants," but "*The Lives of Highwaymen*" have brought our bookseller a competent fortune, and the enormous sale of "The Lives of Men that never Lived" (by which the novel is meant) have set him up for life. This latest modern improvement in writing enables a man to "read all his life and have no knowledge at all." Modern books not only dispose to gallantry and coquetry, but give rules for them. Cæsar's commentaries and the account of Xenophon's expedition are not more studied by military commanders than our novels are by the fair ; to a different purpose indeed, for their military maxims teach to conquer, ours to yield ; those inflame the vain and idle love of glory, these inculcate a noble contempt of reputation. If the women had not the friendly assistance of modern

fiction, the bookseller fears they might long remain "in an insipid purity of mind; with a discouraging reserve of behaviour."

Plutarch is shocked at so much degeneracy of taste and wishes that for the sake of the good example he had expatiated more on the character of Lucretia and some other heroines. It grieves him to hear that chastity is no longer valued, and that crime and immorality, far from meeting with the punishment they deserve, are universally applauded. And yet it is not more than a century since a Frenchman wrote a much admired Life of Cyrus under the name of Artamenes [1], in which he ascribed to him far greater actions than those recorded of him by Xenophon and Herodotus. He goes on to praise the gallant days of chivalry, when authors made it their business to incite men to virtue by holding up as an example the deeds of fabulous heroes, whereas it seems to be the custom of a later age to incite them to vice by the history of fabulous scoundrels. "Men of fine imagination have soared into the regions of fancy to bring back Astrea: you go thither in search of Pandora, oh disgrace to letters! Oh shame to the Muses!"

The bookseller's feeble remonstrance that authors have to comply with the manners and disposition of those who are to read them, is met with the indignant remark that they should first of all correct the vices and follies of their age. To give examples of domestic virtue would surely be more useful to women than to inflame their minds with the deeds of great heroines. "True female praise arises not from the pursuit of public fame, but from an equal progress in the path marked out for them by their great Creator."

Thus we find that even Plutarch is pressed into service to inculcate a religious moral. The Bluestocking ladies were sufficiently enlightened to recognise the deep wisdom of the Ancients, which is of all ages and independent of religious doctrines. Mrs. Carter, the translator of Epictetus, was a woman of profound piety.

The bookseller now remarks that some authors have indeed tried to instil virtuous notions. In *Clarissa Harlowe* "one finds the dignity of heroism tempered by the meekness and humility of religion, a perfect purity of mind and sanctity of manners", and *Sir Charles Grandison* is "a noble pattern of every private virtue, with sentiments so exalted as to render him equal to every public duty." Next to

1) There seems to have been a good deal of uncertainty as to the authorship of the works of the famous brother and sister. Contemporary opinion unanimously assigns that of "*Le Grand Cyrus*" to Madeleine de Scudéry, and not to her brother George.

Richardson, Fielding and Marivaux are remarkable for their fine moral touches, and some comfort is to be derived from the reflection that when there is wit and elegance enough in a book to make it sell, it is not the worse for good morals.

Here Charon appears to conduct our bookseller to his future abode, but deeming him after all "too frivolous an animal to present to wise Minos", proposes to constitute him *friseur* to Tisiphone, and make him "curl up her locks with satires and libels".

The above pieces derive their chief interest from the fact that they are among the very first instances of female satire of a kind which in being more pointed and more direct than that of the Spectator, and less bitter and exaggerated than that of Swift, written by a member of the sex who was herself a recognised leader of society, was more calculated than anything else to impress the female mind with the necessity of thorough reform.

Strange to say, Mrs. Montagu's claims for female instruction other than moral are very modest. It is a subject she seldom refers to, although there is a letter dated 1773 to her sister-in-law Mrs. Robinson, containing a reference to the education of her little niece, in which she certainly does not aim very high. A boardingschool is recommended in spite of the fact that what girls learn there is most trifling, "but they unlearn what would be of great disservice — a provincial dialect which is extremely ungenteel, and other tricks that they learn in the nursery." French lessons she deems unnecessary, "unless for persons in very high life", and she expects a great deal of benefit from a good air and a good dancing-master. Mrs. Montagu here presents that curious mixture of good sense and narrow conventionality which proves the extreme difficulty of getting away from influences and forming an independent judgment.

In the "*Essay on Shakespeare*" (1769) Mrs. Montagu appears as a literary critic. She felt offended at Voltaire's disparagement of the great English author and also at the Frenchman's haughty arrogance. The Essay was favourably criticised in the *Critical Review*, and Cowper praised it in a letter to Lady Hesketh in the following words : "I no longer wonder that Mrs. Montagu stands at the head of all that is called learned, and that every critic veils his bonnet to her superior judgment..... The learning, the good sense, the sound judgment, and the wit displayed in it fully justify not only my compliment, but all compliments that either have been already paid to her talents or shall be paid hereafter." But Johnson spoke scornfully of it. He

said he had "taken up the end of the web, and finding it packthread, had thought it useless to go further in search of embroidery," but had to grant afterwards that it was conclusive against Voltaire. It procured Mrs. Montagu a great many friends in France, where such wit as hers was sure to find full appreciation. When, seven years later, she visited Paris, Voltaire wrote another furious article against Shakespeare, which was read at the Académie in her presence. "I think Madam," said one of the members when the reading was over, "you must be rather sorry at what you have just heard." Mrs. Montagu shrugged her shoulders. "I, Sir! Not at all! I am not one of M. Voltaire's friends!"

Of quite a different cast of character was Mrs. Chapone, whose "*Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*" were dedicated to Mrs. Montagu. She was plain and uninteresting, and when the romance of her life had taken an untimely ending, it is to be feared her conversation became too much like sermonizing to suit vivacious young ladies like Fanny Burney, who thought her assemblies "very dull". But whatever she wrote bears the stamp of sincerity. She was evidently deeply concerned about the moral welfare of the niece she addresed in her Letters — the example set by Mme de Sévigné and imitated by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had found followers — and she honestly tried to reconcile what was noble and proper in her eyes with the demands of convention. Above all she tried to inculcate that sense of responsibility for our actions which she held to be the basis of true Christianity. All our strivings should have the same purpose; that of bringing us nearer to God. Her niece is told to render herself more useful and pleasing to her fellow-creatures (a concession to prevailing opinions), "*and consequently more acceptable to God*". This last addition completely subverts the meaning of what precedes. Without it, the sense would be: "Please others and you will please your own vanity," which now becomes: "Please others and try to make them happy, and you will please God."

Mrs. Chapone thought pride and vanity the worst vices. Men were particularly addicted to the former, since to be proud is to admire oneself; and women to the latter, for vain is she who desires to be admired by others. It is the vice of little minds, chiefly conversant with trifling subjects, and brings affectation in its train.

The vain woman turns exaggerated weakness to account to ensure her empire over the stronger sex. Thus arises that false sensibility which will weep for a fly and leads to a thousand excesses. A well-directed reason will keep the feelings under control and spur us

to actions of Christian charity. Those who relieve the sufferer are of more benefit to him than those who lament over his misfortunes.

Sensibility is, indeed, one of the catchwords of the century. Originally a laudable compassion and sympathy with the sufferings of others and a reaction against "the faithless coldness of the times", Richardson's novels show how soon it began to degenerate into sickly sentimentality which, when indulging in the luxury of woe, forgot to relieve the suffering which called forth the tears of sentiment. One of the most serious charges brought against J. J. Rousseau was that in his "*Nouvelle Héloise*" and in his "*Confessions*" he makes his lovers wallow to a sickening extent in the ecstasy of grief, inducing others by the magic of his personality to imitate him. This false sensibility was as much the abomination of the Bluestocking ladies as a well-regulated fellow-feeling was thought commendable, and here at least Mary Wollstonecraft heartily agreed with them. The usual reproach that the revolutionary leaders, those "friends of humanity", in fighting for the interest of the human race neglected the immediate wants of the individual — of which argument especially the Anti-Jacobin made ample use — was, therefore, in her case at least, utterly undeserved.

Hannah More made "*Sensibility*" the subject of a poem dedicated to Mrs. Boscawen, and in her "*Strictures*" devoted an entire chapter to it. In both the conclusion runs that sensibility has received its true direction when it is supremely turned to the love of God : "But if religious bias rule the soul, then sensibility exalts the whole."

There is, of course, in Mrs. Chapone's letters the usual warning against the danger of fiction, especially of the sentimental kind, the chief nurse of false sensibility, and also an element arising from the wish to reconcile Christian charity with the "necessary inequality" among individuals : the question of the treatment of inferiors. Since the chief duties of woman are of a domestic nature, it follows that the management of servants will be her task, and the Christian in Mrs. Chapone would see them treated with kind civility, while the lady of quality in her warns against the danger of too close intimacy with people of low birth and education. The idea of raising them by slow degrees to a higher social level probably never suggested itself to her.

Her ideal of female instruction must be likewise described as in the main conventional, with a few useful hints to mark a partial advance. Dancing and French are "so universal that they cannot be

dispensed with", but music and drawing she wanted to be taught only to those who were qualified by possessing talent. The study of history is recommended as giving a liberal and comprehensive view of human nature, and supplying materials for conversation, and the reading of poetry will improve the female imagination, which only wants regulating to be superior to that of men. Shakespeare, Milton, and Mrs. Montagu's *Essay* ought to be the object of diligent study, and even heathen mythology and Greek philosophy may be recommended as containing a strong moral element. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake clearly did not appeal to Mrs. Chapone at all.

The most pronounced character among the Bluestockings, as well as the most privileged among them in literary gifts was beyond any doubt Mrs. Hannah More. [1]) It will be interesting, in continuation of the more general appreciation of respective tendencies in the introduction to this chapter, to contrast her with Mary Wollstonecraft with a view to establishing the chief causes from which the difference in their ideas arose, and arriving at a vindication of the laudable intentions of both.

If Mary Wollstonecraft was turned into a social reformer chiefly through the influence of the outward circumstances which dominated her youth, Hannah More's career was largely the consequence of certain innate qualities, which predestined her to become a moralist. She may have inherited her preaching propensities from her father, who had himself been designed for the church before circumstances interfered to turn him into a schoolmaster. Her mother, a farmer's daughter, devoted herself entirely to the children's education. In her earliest youth, little Hannah's favourite pastime — as her biographer and admirer Mr. W. Roberts tells us in his memoirs — was the writing of long exhortative letters "to depraved characters", and when in later years she lived at Mrs. Garrick's we find her referred to as the latter's "domestic chaplain". And yet she could be witty enough when she chose and was not without a sense of humour. At the time of the writing of her "*Bas Bleu*" she sent her friend Mrs. Pepys a pair of stockings for one of her children, accompanied by a letter, "*The Bas Blanc*", in which she treats the subject as if it were an epic, "so far of a moral cast that its chief end is utility," — hoping the child will be able "to run through it with pleasure". She goes on to say that "the exordium is the natural introduction by which you are led into

1) Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More took brevet-rank as a matron by virtue of her literary publications.

the whole work. The middle, I trust, is free from any unnatural humour or inflation, and the end from any disproportionate littleness. I have avoided bringing about the catastrophe too suddenly, as I know that would hurt him at whose feet I lay it", and so on in the same strain. Mary Wollstonecraft would have been utterly incapable of such playfulness. A further determining factor in the difference in the lives of both was the treatment received at the hands of the influential. Mary was first treated with indifference and coldness, and afterwards reviled for her opinions, whereas Hannah More was courted and flattered in a way which might have turned the head of any more volatile girl. To the struggle for life of which Mary bore the marks till her dying-day, Hannah was a total stranger, having had a comfortable annuity settled on her by a Mr. Turner, who once made her an offer of marriage. Thus secured against penury, that constant dread of rising authors, Hannah could go to London and give herself up to social amusements and to literature. Her meeting with Garrick ensured her a hearty welcome in Bluestocking circles, and his support smoothed her brief dramatic career and contributed to the warm reception of her first poetic attempts. They represent her contribution to romanticism, and gained the approval of no less a critic than Dr. Johnson himself.

Hannah More thus became a universal favourite, and her "vers de société" became very popular. However, her career as a dramatist came to an end with Garrick's death, and after the success of "*Bas Bleu*" and "*Sensibility*" she more and more directed her energies towards social and moral reform. The Bluestocking assemblies, much as they appealed to her love of witty conversation, afforded no outlet for that pent-up energy which made her long for some worthy object on which to concentrate herself for the benefit of society. It may be said that from the decade which saw the outbreak of the French Revolution dates the participation of English women in the discussion of the great social problems by which the times were stirred. It was as natural that Hannah More should openly declare herself in favour of a strict maintenance of the existing social order as that Mary Wollstonecraft should become the champion of radical social and political reform. Thus, each of the contending parties numbered among the warmest advocates of their cause a member of the female sex. And yet, previous to the great social upheaval in France, Hannah More at one time seemed likely to range herself among the partisans of moderate social reform. Her first social object

was found in the struggle for the abolition of the slave-trade which in 1787 held the attention of Parliament. Mr. Wilberforce became her "Red Cross Knight", and Hannah wrote a poem entitled "*The Black Slave Trade*", in which her attitude towards the Revolution is foreshadowed. The lines:

> Shall Britain, *where the soul of freedom reigns*,
> Forge chains for others she herself disdains?
> Forbid it, Heaven! O let the nation know,
> The liberty she tastes she will bestow;

are sufficient to show that she consented to be the champion of liberty in other countries only while they regarded England as the natural home of Freedom. Burke had no more faithful follower among his conservative friends than the reformer Hannah More.

After the outbreak of the Revolution she soon altered her opinion that, although the capture of the Bastille had been undertaken by "lawless rabble" yet "some good" might be expected from it. Price's sermon filled her with horror, and Burke's *Reflections* had her undivided sympathy. While engaged upon religious tracts and plans for instructing the children of the poor came the news of Dupont's speech in the National Assembly, attacking all religion and calling Nature and Reason the gods of men. Indignation made Hannah take up her pen in reply, and refute the atheistic arguments in a pamphlet. The success of this effort caused her to be solicited from all sides to undertake the refutation of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Her humorous treatment of the subject in this second tract, entitled "*Village Politics, by Will Chip*", appealed to the class for whom it was chiefly intended and was a distinct success, as were her doggerel ballads on the subject, some of which were to popular tunes, preaching submission to the existing social order, for, as "Will Chip" puts it in his "true Rights of Man":

> That some must be poorer, this truth will I sing,
> *Is the law of my Maker*, and not of my king;
> And the true Rights of Man, and the life of his cause,
> Is not equal possessions; but equal, just laws.

Hannah's sympathy went out to patient Joe, the Newcastle collier, who held that "all things which happened were best", and to the ploughman who felt safe in his cottage with the British laws for his guard: "If the Squire should oppress, I get instant redress"; a

view which the author of *Caleb Williams* emphatically did not share, and which makes the modern reader feel as if Hannah More were "laying it on a little too thick."

Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft — who, as will be seen in the next chapter, ranged herself among the opponents of Burke — thus took opposite sides in the great struggle, defending diametrically opposed principles, yet collaborating in gradually weaning the reading public from the conventional notion that the domain of literature was taboo to women and in accustoming them to the unwonted spectacle of women participating in a social struggle.

Mary Wollstonecraft's claims for a complete emancipation impressed Hannah More as directed straight against the divine authority. The state of inequality, we have seen, was looked upon by her as God's will, and to rebel against it was to oppose the decrees of the Almighty. The right way to benefit her sex seemed to her to insist on a better moral education. On this subject at least the two political adversaries were agreed. "In those countries in which fondness for the mere persons of women is carried to the highest excess, they are slaves ; their moral and intellectual degradation increases in direct proportion to the adoration which is paid to their charms" is one of the many statements in Hannah More's "*Strictures on Female Education*" [1]) which Mary Wollstonecraft might have written, and both saw in a liberal moral education the only remedy. At this point, however, the two paths become separated. To Mary Wollstonecraft female education was merely one of the milestones in the march towards perfection ; to Hannah More it seemed that women might be made instrumental "to raise the depressed tone of public morals and to awaken the drowsy spirit of religious principle", and also that they might be called upon "to come forward and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country." With Hannah More, high morality and patriotism necessarily went hand in hand. Her ideal was to see all English women join in a thorough reform of manners and morals, that her country might become not only the bulwark of tradition against the mania for innovation, but also that of the religion she held sacred against the onslaughts of atheism coming from across the Channel.

If she had a less fervent temperament than Mary, she compensated for this lack through her practical insight, which told her that sudden

1) p. 2.

radical changes are apt to destroy the edifice of ages, without offering anything solid as a substitute. She felt the guardian of her sex against the attacks of infidelity which in her eyes were principally directed against the female heart. "Conscious of the influence of women in civil society, *conscious of the effect which female infidelity produced in France*, they attribute the ill success of their attempts in this country to their having been hitherto chiefly addressed to the male sex. They are now sedulously labouring to destroy the religious principles of women, and in too many instances have fatally succeeded. For this purpose not only novels and romances have been made the vehicles of vice and infidelity, but the same allurement has been held out to the women of our country which was employed in the Garden of Eden by the first philosophist to the first sinner, — knowledge" [1]).

The above lines determine Hannah More's attitude towards female learning, which she regarded as the devil's own bait. As an example of the corrupting tendencies of foreign literature she makes a few remarks on the much-admired German plays of "*The Robbers*" and "*The Stranger*", the second of which presents the character of an adulteress in the most pleasing and fascinating colours. "To make matters worse, the German example has found a follower in a woman, a professed admirer and imitator of the German suicide Werter. The female Werter, as she is styled by her biographer, asserts in a work entitled, "*The Wrongs of Women*" that adultery is justifiable, and that the restrictions placed on it by the laws of England, constitute one of the wrongs of women". [2])

To come to a correct understanding of this passage, it is necessary to remember that the "*Strictures*" were written in 1799, when the remembrance of Mary Wollstonecraft's attempt at suicide was still fresh, and when her unexpected death had drawn attention to Godwin's edition of her works, the only one containing "*Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*".

In their ideas of marriage, as indeed in all their applications of religious precepts, the gulf between Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft becomes immeasurably wide. But wherever the sense of moral duty, unhampered by convention or by a rigid philosophical harness, was free to assert itself, it is curious to note the close affinity between the ideas of two women who occupied such widely different

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1) *Strictures*, p. 29.
2) *Strictures*, p. 32.

positions in the social life of their time, yet were both so extremely conscious of the moral responsibility of their sex. It remains for us to consider the interesting — if somewhat eccentric — personality of the woman who had brought down upon herself so many charges of gross immorality.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *Radical Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft.*

Around the name of Mary Wollstonecraft a storm of adverse criticism raged for years after her death, prompting Godwin to the publication of his "*Memoirs of the author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*", and calling forth the somewhat half-hearted defence of her actions and writings by an anonymous author in 1803. Both failed to attract any degree of notice. Shelley, whose meetings with young Mary Godwin over her mother's grave in St. Pancras cemetery are described in Mrs. Marshall's biography, offered her the sincere tribute of his verse in "*The Revolt of Islam*", where the heroine resembles her in her character.

The champion of the Cause of Woman was herself an essentially loveable, thoroughly feminine representative of her sex, whose many troubles arose from an extremely sensitive heart, a pure, refined sensibility, without any of the alloy which she was the first to regret in so many other women, and from the circumstance that, being born a century before her time, her strivingwas only moderately successful and brought her the ill-will of many who were unable to appreciate the sincerity of her motives. Nothing could be more undeserved, or bespeak a more glaring ignorance of the character it reviled than Horace Walpole's mention of Mary Wollstonecraft in his letter to Miss Hannah More — in her rigid respectability the direct opposite of the author of the "*Vindication*" — as "a hyena in petticoats, whose books were excommunicated from the pale of his library". Few books and their authors have been the object of such unsparing censure as the *Rights of Women* and Mary Wollstonecraft, and it may be added that seldom was the imputation of meddling spitefulness and even of gross immorality more utterly undeserved. There speaks from the entire work a spirit of absolute sincerity, of disinterested

eagerness for necessary reforms and of that fervent enthusiasm in the pursuit of aims which will not shrink at martyrdom, which endear the author to the unbiased reader, and which only the narrowest conservatism could overlook. Nor would it have met with the bitter antagonism it encountered had not the public mind, harassed by the constant menace of the French Revolution, been overmuch inclined to cry down all works of reform. As it was, Mary Wollstonecraft's reputation passed through three distinctly marked phases; in the first, the work and its author were violently attacked by the many, and enthusiastically defended by the few; in the second, they were consigned to temporary oblivion; in the third, Mr. Kegan Paul in 1876, and after him Miss Mathilde Blind in "*The New Quarterly Review*", Miss H. Zimmern in the "*Deutsche Rundschau*", and E. R. Pennell in the "*Eminent Women Series*" tried with a fair amount of success to awaken a new interest in both and to vindicate the author's memory by clearing her personal character from the monstrous imputations of immorality. The fact has now been definitely established that she was prompted by the noblest love of humanity, and is entitled to rank among those champions of the new faith who suffered martyrdom for the cause. She was one of those predestined by that innate character she was so fain to deny to a life of the bitterest anguish, brightened by spells of almost perfect happiness. Both the joys and the sorrows of humanity were abundantly hers. With her, character was indeed fate, and the outward circumstances of her life only emphasized the convictions to which a woman of her stamp was bound to come in the world of inequality and cruel injustice in which she moved. She combined in her person the rarest gifts of both head and heart; as a quick perception, enabling her to grasp a situation very rapidly; a never-flinching determination to use the divine gift of Reason in the pursuit of useful knowledge, and a boundless devotion to what she considered the obvious task of her life. Once she had discovered her vocation she flung herself into her work with indomitable zeal, trying to do herself violence in asserting the superiority of reason over sentiment, and to put a restraint on the passions that threatened to overpower her. In this attempt she did not always succeed, and while it makes her appear to us thoroughly human, yet her imperfect selfcontrol was not without influence on her works of reform, leading her to exaggeration and wearisome reiterations. In the chapter of the *Vindication* which deals with national education she insists that only that man makes a good citizen, who has in his

youth "exercised the affections of a son and a brother," for public affections grow out of private, and it is in youth that the fondest friendships are formed. This sounds like a confession, for if Mary Wollstonecraft had not been in earlier years such a devoted friend to her dear ones as to utterly disregard her own comfort in her desire to befriend them, she could never have loved humanity with such intensity. It is difficult to say what would have become of the Wollstonecraft household if Mary had not strained every faculty to assist them. When her drunken father beat his wife, the latter used to appeal to Mary for protection. When at last the poor soul felt death approach, it was again Mary who without a second's hesitation flung up her situation as a lady's companion at Bath to return to her mother's sickbed and to ease her last moments. Not only her sisters Everina and Eliza, but also her younger brothers Charles and James received from her both moral and financial support, to be able to give which she cramped herself to such an extent that the room in George Street in which she wrote was furnished only with the barest necessaries, and her gowns were so extremely shabby that Knowles in his "*Life of Fuseli*" describes her as "a philosophical sloven". In thus reducing her wants, however, she was merely acting in accordance with the view — held by all the friends of reform and derived from Rousseau — that only he can be happy whose desires are so few that he can afford to gratify them, an offshoot of the famous Nature-theory. Nevertheless, the description of Mary as a "sloven" seems exaggerated, judging from the two portraits by Opie which have been preserved, of which the one may be spurious, but the other, now in the National Portrait Gallery, is beyond any doubt genuine. It shows the face ("physiognomy" Mary Wollstonecraft herself would have preferred to call it) of a strikingly pretty, refined-looking woman, with a profusion of auburn hair, a clear complexion and a pleading look in her brown eyes which reminded Mr. Kegan Paul of Beatrice Cenci.

The grim realities of Mary's youth left little space for the development of any sense of humour, but they bred in her a fighting spirit which afterwards stood her in good stead. Her next championship was that of Fanny Blood, whom she shielded from domestic misery very much like that she had herself experienced, and whose brother George, who became involved in a nasty scandal [1]), also experienced

1) C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin, His Friends and Contemporaries.*

Mary's all-embracing kindness of heart. From her correspondence with him in the years of his forced absence from England it indeed appears that she was not by any means a "fair-weather friend".

The extremely serious cast of her character — which circumstances afterwards developed into melancholy — also found expression in a strong sense of duty. Unlike those champions of humanity who clamour for the rights of Man without reference to the corresponding obligations, Mary Wollstonecraft in later years always insisted not only that every right of necessity involves a duty, but also that we should insist upon those rights chiefly to be enabled to perform the moral duties which life imposes. Add to this an absolute "incapability of disguise", as her friend and publisher Johnson expressed it, and a frankness which made her "fling whate'er she felt, not fearing, into words" — often uncovering the worst sores of society in all their hideousness with a determination bordering upon indelicacy — and the portrait of Mary's character, as far as elementary traits go, is complete.

The strong natural bent of her character was further emphasized by incidents which presented to her mind the problem of the subjugation of women urgently demanding a champion. On three different occasions did she see the lives of women ruined by cruel, dissipated husbands. The third of these was by far the worst. It concerned the marriage of her sister Eliza ("Poor Bess", as Mary calls her in her correspondence with Everina and Fanny), to a Mr. Bishop, who, although he was probably a clergyman, appears to have been a most hypocritically sensual brute. No doubt the wife also was to blame; indeed, all the Wollstonecraft girls were inclined to be suspicious, irritable, and over-ready to take offence. Shortly after the birth of a child matters came to a crisis, and Mary, having come over to nurse her sister, who after her confinement had had an attack of insanity, proposed that they should leave Mr. Bishop's house together, a plan actually carried into execution, after which Mary, Eliza and Fanny Blood started teaching as a profession. The daily bickerings of the Bishop household impressed upon Mary's mind the state of utter defencelessness and abject slavery in which many women were kept. It afterwards made her decide to supplement her "*Rights of Women*" with a novel, dealing with the Wrongs of Women, in which some of the incidents she had witnessed found a place. The work was unfortunately interrupted by her unexpected death, and in its unfinished state was included by Godwin in the posthumous edition

of some of Mary Wollstonecraft's works in 1798. Thus death claimed her while making a last effort to succour the oppressed.

With the sisters' flight from Mr. Bishop's house began the long struggle against adverse circumstances in which Mary did most of the fighting. One wonders what would have become of Eliza and the boys — who had soon left their father's home — but for Mary's resourcefulness. Everina found a home with Edward, the eldest brother, who obviously thought that in sheltering her he had done all that could be expected of him. The girls met with little or no sympathy from friends, the general opinion finding fault with Eliza's conduct and judging that "women should accept without a murmur whatever it suits their husbands to give them, whether it be kindness or blows". This represents the general belief of those days with regard to the position of married women. The possibility of girls of the better middle class having at any time of their lives to earn their own living had never been seriously considered, and the sisters were indeed in great distress. Again Mary had the utter incapacity of even the bravest of her sex to support themselves brought home to her in a way that left no doubt. And yet the two or three years of the little boarding-school at Newington Green were not wholly devoid of enjoyment. Mary made the acquaintance of the famous Dr. Price, the dissenting preacher who was soon to rouse the fire of Burke's indignation, and who strongly influenced her religious views.

It seems the right place here to say something of Mary's attitude towards religion. In a life like hers, bringing her face to face with the evils of existing society, and with her degree of sensitiveness it is but natural that religious feelings should have played a prominent part. Her mother had bred her in the principles of the Church of England, but Mary was far too independent to allow her mother any real influence. But at least the circumstances of her youth saved her from sophistic teachings, which may form hypocrites or awaken an altogether disproportionate hatred of whatever smacks of Christianity, under the impression that Christianity and the dogmatism of narrow-minded orthodoxy are at bottom one and the same thing. Such was Godwin's case, and it proved a deathblow to his faith. Mary, however, was a great deal left to herself and, as Godwin informs us in the *Memoirs*, her religion was mostly of her own creation, and little allied to any system of forms. The many Biblical quotations in her works suggest diligent reading of the Bible and point to a state of mind very far removed from indifference or antipathy. She rather felt a

natural leaning towards religion, a craving for mental peace to be satisfied only by firm religious convictions. As Godwin puts it, the tenets of her system were the growth of her own moral taste, and her religion therefore was always a gratification, never a terror to her. The same almost feminine yearning for the moral support of a religion that warms the heart, distinguished Rousseau from the robust and self-reliant philosophers of the rational school, and possibly caused Mary Wollstonecraft to feel attracted towards him and at the same time to pity him, when first reading his "*Emile*" 1). Up to the time of her first meeting with Dr. Price her attitude had been that of simple faith, with constant appeals to the Divine interference. She had been a regular church-goer, and it is quite possible that the public and regular routine of sermons and prayers and the implicit subjection it demands, had already begun to pall upon her, and predisposed her for the adoption of the less dogmatic views of Deism. It may also be safely assumed that her experiences in Ireland as a governess and the subsequent period of close intimacy with some of the leading revolutionists lessened her interest in religion, which points to the future, and proportionately increased that in Man, who is the present. As the years advanced, the rapid growth of her considerable intellectual powers, the tendencies of the times in which she lived, and the society which she frequented made her drift unconsciously towards rationalism. Then it was that a conflict arose between Sentiment and Intellect. She set about "repressing her natural ardour and granting a more considerable influence to the dictates of Reason", or, as Professor Dowden puts it, "she set her brain as a sentinel over her heart, trying to put a curb on her natural impulsiveness".

This change in her views of life, dating from her intimacy with Price, was hastened by circumstances. The death of her friend Fanny — who died in her arms at Lisbon, — and the want of success of her first educational efforts — due chiefly to Mrs. Bishop's mismanagement of the school in Mary's absence — had made her feel low-spirited and ill. It was only the sale of the manuscript of the "*Thoughts on*

1) See Letter from Mary to Everina, dated from Dublin, March. 24th. 1788, with which compare the following severe judgment by Hannah More in her *Strictures*: "It is worthy of remark that 'Depart from me, I never knew you', is not the malediction denounced on the sceptic or the scoffer, but on the high professor, on the unfruitful worker of "miracles", on the unsanctified utterer of "prophecies", for even acts of piety, wanting the purifying principle, however they may dazzle men, offend God. Cain sacrificed, Balaam prophesied, Rousseau most sublimely panegyrised the son of Mary ...." Those who lacked true humanity did not fall within the range of Hannah More's compassion.

2) E. Dowden, *The French Revolution and English Literature.*

*the Education of Daughters*" to Mr. Johnson, the publisher of Fleet Street, for ten guineas — part of which sum she sent to the Bloods whose straits were worse than her own — that staved off utter ruin. She relinquished her work as a schoolmistress, and through her friend Mr. Prior, assistant master at Eton, obtained the situation of governess to the children of Lord Kingsborough at a salary of forty pounds a year. Before leaving for Mitchelstown in Ireland, she spent some time with the Priors at Eton, where she had an opportunity to study the life in an English public-school. It did not impress her favourably and gave rise to some severe criticism in the *Rights of Women* on the subject of false religion and undue attachment to outward things. "I could not live the life they lead at Eton", she says in a letter to her sister Everina, "nothing but dress and ridicule going forward, and I really believe their fondness for ridicule tends to make them affected, the women in their manners, and the men in their conversation, for witlings abound and puns fly about like crackers, though you would scarcely guess they had any meaning in them, if you did not hear the noise they create". This was her first glimpse of society. In the same letter she finds comfort in the reflection that the time will come when "the God of love will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and neither death nor accidents of any kind will interpose to separate us from those we love". No wonder she was horrified at the boy who only consented to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to avoid forfeiting half a guinea!

She was now, indeed, entering upon a new phase of her life. She had witnessed the horrors of a domestic life in which drunkenness and other moral vices reigned supreme; she was now to behold the utter worthlessness of the pleasure-seeking, irresponsible upper classes, whose religion was all sham, and who tried to make up in dogmatic narrowness what they lacked in true piety. It was the conduct of her own sex that most of all disgusted her. It taught her that the absurd distinctions of rank corrupted not merely the oppressed dependents, but also their tyrants, whose only claim to respectability was in the titles they held. In short, it turned her from a mere educator into a social reformer, and from a devout Christian into a Deist.

What struck her most forcibly about the women of the Kingsborough household was their unfitness for their chief task in life: that of educating their own children. They represented a varied catalogue of female errors. Lady Kingsborough was too much occupied with her dogs to care for her children, whom she left to the care of

their governess. When afterwards that governess came to stand first in the children's affections, she promptly dismissed her. Mary Wollstonecraft's revilers have tried to substantiate the charge of irreligiousness against her by pointing out that her favourite pupil Margaret — afterwards Lady Mount Cashel — was not wholly without blame in her later life; thus ignoring the degrading influence of a mother like Lady Kingsborough, and overlooking the fact that Mary's stay in Ireland lasted only one year. In her correspondence with Mrs. Bishop there is a description of Lady Kingsborough's stepmother and her three daughters, "fine girls, just going to market, as their brother says". This short sentence shows the state of revolt she was in against the frivolity of women in making a wealthy marriage the sole aim of life. If, therefore, her religious principles were of a sternness hardly suited to the practice of those days, it need not necessarily be the former that were at fault. The imputation of insincerity, however, merits absolute contempt. Here, indeed, "to doubt her goodness were to want a heart". It is impossible to read any portion of her works without being struck by the earnest tone of sincere piety which pervades them all. It was a great pity that what she saw of Christianity prevented her from going to the source of that religion, which might have given her that peace "which passeth understanding" for which her heart yearned and which the vagueness of her deistic views, although better suited to satisfy her Reason, could not supply.

While at Bristol Hot Wells in the summer of 1788 she wrote a little book entitled "*Mary, A Fiction*", relating the incidents of her friendship with Fanny Blood. But is is not the incidents that make the charm of this composition. Godwin, who could admire in another those qualities which he knew he himself lacked, says that in it "the feelings are of the truest and most exquisite class; every circumstance is adorned with that species of imagination which enlists itself under the banners of delicacy and sentiment" [1]).

Mary's dismissal as a governess fortunately did not leave her unprovided for. The generous Mr. Johnson found her lodgings in George Street, near Blackfriar's Bridge, and made her his reader. She criticised the manuscripts sent to him, and the kindness and sincerity of her criticisms brought her a few real friends, among whom was Miss Hayes, who afterwards became the means of bringing her and Godwin together. Mr. Johnson had juist started the *Analytical Review*, in

1) W. Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Women.*

which Mary took a considerable share. The many translations she did at this period were suggested by Johnson, and as such throw no light on her personal taste, but in the case of Salzmann's "*Moralisches Elementarbuch*" he certainly gave her a congenial subject. She had by this time read Rousseau's *Emile*, with the main tendencies of which she agreed as far as the boy Emile was concerned, but whose ideal of womanhood, embodied in Sophie, was very far removed from her own, and also Thomas Day's "*Sandford and Merton*," in which the influence of Rousseau is very marked. The ideas expressed by Day, corroborated and added to by her own experience and by Salzmann's theories, form the basis of her "*Original Stories from Real Life, with Conversations calculated to regulate the Affections and form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*". (1788). The idea of a private tutor (or preceptor) had been Rousseau's, and Day makes a kind-hearted clergyman, Mr. Barlow, who had attained excellent results in the training of young Harry Sandford, a farmer's son, undertake the instruction of Tommy Merton, the son of a rich planter of Jamaica. Day obviously cannot refrain from introducing the theme of class-distinctions, making the farmer's child appear to great advantage by the side of the gentleman's son, who has been utterly spoiled by an over-indulgent mother and has had the whole catalogue of prejudices of birth and station inculcated into him. The story consists of a string of incidents, partly arising from natural causes and partly due to Mr. Barlow's "coups de théâtre pédagogiques", in which Rousseau also was fond of indulging. They all contribute towards the formation of Tommy's mind and heart, in conjunction with a number of stories, told at the psychological moment by their preceptor, which it appears do not fail to produce their effect, for Tommy is promptly changed from an insufferable little despot into a paragon of virtue. Nor is he slow himself to adopt the oracular tone of self-sufficiency which Harry exhibits from the first. Where Day's book differs from Rousseau, — which is only in two respects, — the deviation is due to the fact that Rousseau was essentially a theorist, whose aim was to provide an educational scheme, whilst Day in combination with Mr. Edgeworth meant to, and did carry his theories into practice, in doing which he had to make a good many concessions to outward circumstances. Rousseau seldom indulges in story-stelling, in his scheme the work of instructing the child under twelve (Tommy and Harry are only six) is left to Nature, and the preceptor keeps his precepts to himself and merely mounts the most jealous guard over his pupil to ward off undesirable influen-

ces and to leave Nature undisturbed in accomplishing her task. Thus Rousseau advises the negative education for young children. In Day, however, the preceptor takes a decidedly active part, and both by precept and example directs his pupils' thoughts towards certain conclusions they are meant to draw. A natural consequence of Rousseau's radical Nature-scheme is that the pleasure of reading books — beyond a few of great practical value to the Man of Nature, such as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe — is withheld from the young pupil, who is only taught to read at his own request, and at a much later age. Instead, he should be content to read the book of Nature, which is in a language every human creature can understand. Here again the more practical Day disagrees, and in *Sandford and Merton* books play a prominent part. Again, Rousseau wants to separate his pupil not only from the family to which he belongs, but from all other children, thus overlooking the important factor of inter-education. Day educates the two boys together and occasionally brings them in contact with other children also, mostly of the peasant-class.

For the rest, however, there is a close parallelism between the two systems. Stress is laid on simplicity being the mother of all virtues, the boys are taught to regard manual labour as an honest occupation of which no so-called "gentleman" need be ashamed, and which may stand him in good stead should circumstances make it necessary for him to earn his own living. They have their physical strength developed by manly exercise, and the advantages accruing from a life in accordance with the dictates of Nature are pointed out to them in a most suggestive way. They learn to regard class-privileges with scorn; to them a "man" is a being superior to a "gentleman"; are taught that the only property a man is entitled to is the result of his own labour; and acquire some knowledge of botany, zoology, cosmography, geography and in general of such subjects as may render the child more fit for a life in accordance with Nature such as Day himself practised.

It need hardly be said that Mary Wollstonecraft's educational ideas did not go the entire length of Day's somewhat eccentric radicalism. She sympathised with Rousseau's Nature-scheme only inasmuch as it asserted the advantages of country-life and did away with conventionality. Although accustomed to the most rigid simplicity, she never approached the utter disregard of appearances which Day professed to feel. She utterly disagreed with Rousseau where he asserted the necessity of giving girls an education "relative to men", it

being one of the chief aims of her later works to show that there should be no difference of principles in the education of the two sexes ; but she applied a great many of Rousseau suggestions, which he intended for boys, to her own sex. Far from wishing to furnish a complete scheme for the education of young girls upon a basis of abstract reasoning, she follows Day in attacking the defects most common to childhood and in trying to establish a standard of virtue which may be attained by following Reason. She entirely relies upon the force of a moral lesson contained in a well-told story, or, better still, illustrated by personal example. In one point of difference the contrast in character between her and Rousseau becomes most obvious. The latter's lack of moral firmness makes him, while shielding his pupil from the evil influence of his surroundings, rather unaccountably overlook the necessity of inculcating a sense of duty. His scheme has no ethical background. In Mary Wollstonecraft, however, this ethical background is the essential thing. Her parting advice to her pupils (voiced by Mrs. Mason) is : "Recollect, that from religion your chief comfort must spring, and never neglect the duty of prayer. Learn from experience the comfort that arises from making known your wants and sorrows to the wisest and best of Beings not only of this life, but of that which is to come." Rousseau's pupil was not likely to become a "striver", Mary Wollstonecraft's had had high ethical principles instilled into her.

The lack of incentives to virtue which characterises Rousseau's scheme may be the consequence of his theory of original innocence. He does not believe in the existence of evil in connection with the Divine Will, but holds that evil is merely the consequence of wrong opinions. Here he was Godwin's teacher. A radical change in individual opinion will cause evil to disappear. How original sin and evil could find their way into the world, mankind being in a state of perfect innocence, he does not explain. Godwin, and with him Mary Wollstonecraft, were of opinion that there is in mankind no natural bias towards either good or evil, and that everything depends on the forming of the mind, hence the all-importance of education.

Religion, therefore, is an essential part of Mary Wollstonecraft's educational plan. It is true that the child cannot grasp the fundamental truths, its power of reasoning being as yet limited, and should not for this reason be permitted to read the Bible. But her girls are taught from the first that "religion ought to be the active director of our affections" and that "happiness can only arise from imitating God in a

life guided by considerations of virtue. Virtue, according to her mouth-piece Mrs. Mason, is "the exercise of benevolent affections to please God and bring comfort and happiness here, and become angels hereafter."

In the "*Original Stories*" we have some of the theories of the *Rights of Women* presented to us in a nutshell. They claim for girls equality of education with boys, and indirectly deny the sexual character theory, based on that of innate principles, which Mary Wollstonecraft agreed with Godwin did not exist. Rousseau held that Reason was the prerogative of Man, and that Woman's substitute for it was Sensibility. Man was made to think, and Woman to feel. "Whatever is in Nature is right", was the axiom he applied to the case of Woman. Nature meant her to be kept in a state of subjection to Man, and to give her an education without regarding the limitations of her sex would have seemed to him flying in the face of providence.

Mary Wollstonecraft's views of society were sufficiently pessimistic to consider the average parent utterly unfit to educate a child. She therefore adhered to Rousseau's idea of a preceptor. Her two girls, Mary and Caroline, aged 14 and 12, far from having been kept in ignorance, and further handicapped by the death of their mother, had already imbibed some false notions and prejudices. Mary's judgment was not sufficiently cool to make her realise that appearances are often deceptive, and that bodily defects may be found together with excellent moral qualities. She had an unfortunate turn for ridicule. Her sister Caroline, by being vain of her person, proved that she did not understand the source of true merit. It was, therefore, the task of their monitress to carefully eradicate these prejudices and to substitute for them correct notions of true virtue. In Mrs. Mason, Mary Wollstonecraft enriched English literature with the portrait of the typical British matron with "no nonsense about her", but in making this woman her mouth-piece she scarcely did justice to the qualities of her own heart. It was the struggle of her life to make her heart yield to the dictates of Reason, and Mrs. Mason certainly does not impress the reader as struggling very hard. She is the embodiment of pure, undiluted Reason in all its unyielding sternness. Any show of tenderness towards her charges would have seemed to her a confession of weakness. When after a long spell of life together she returns them to their father, they have advanced just far enough in her affection to be termed "candidates for her friendship"; which, by

the way, is meant to imply that they have made satisfactory progress in the faculty of Reason.

Mary Wollstonecraft for the moment does not seem to realise that the essential quality in an educator should be to make her pupils not only respect, but also love her, and Mrs. Mason is a most unloveable person. Her haughty arrogance and insufferable self-sufficiency were not likely to escape her eldest pupil's sense of humour and could not but seriously affect her influence over the girls. Thus the children of Mary Wollstonecraft's fancy are brought up in the midst of reasoning logic, unwarmed by the sunshine of parental love.

To make matters worse, this champion of liberty, who found fault with Rousseau for failing to see that his schemes of freedom applied with equal justice to women ; who was soon herself to protest against the abuse of parental authority, who held with Locke that "if the mind be curbed and humbled too much in children, if the spirit be abased and broken much by too strict a hand over them, they lose all their vigour and industry", herself made the fatal mistake of aiding and abetting the thraldom of the young girl. The education which Mary and Caroline receive is nothing but a dreary course of constant admonition, in which the word liberty would be utterly misplaced. She has entirely failed to catch the spirit of Rousseau's *Emile*, in which the instructor only prevents the pupil from hurting himself overmuch through his ignorance, leaving him otherwise free to draw the conclusions of awakening Reason, and above all allowing him to live out his life. Harry Sandford and Tommy Merton go together for long walks in the woods, get lost and owe their rescue to the lucky accident of meeting a boy who takes them to his home. When Mr. Barlow is informed that the boys have turned up, he goes to meet them on their way home and merely tells them to be more careful in future, availing himself of the incident to instil certain lessons in geography which smack of Rousseau. But their liberty is in no way cramped. With Mary Wollstonecraft, however, the case is entirely different. One wonders what sort of paragons Mrs. Mason was going to turn out. The chances would seem pretty even between prim old maids and confirmed young hypocrites, depending on those very innate tendencies she was fain to deny ! She held that children should not be left too much freedom, because, the faculty of Reason being as yet insufficiently developed in them, they might make the wrong use of

1) "A slavish bondage to parents cramps every faculty of the mind." (*A Vindication*, Chapter on *Duty to Parents*).

it. But the restrictions on their liberty should be such as to remain almost unnoticed by them. They should not have a variety of prohibitions imposed upon them, as was the case with Lady Kingsborough's children, whom she immediately restored to some degree of liberty. One cannot help thinking that theory and practice often clash, owing to the perpetual conflict between reason and the feelings. Granting, however, that Mrs. Mason had the best and most disinterested intentions, what, we may ask, can be left of liberty to children whom their monitress "never suffers out of her sight?"

In her catalogue of living creatures Mary puts animals at the bottom on account of their being incapable of Reason. They are guided exclusively by instinct, which is a faculty of a coarser growth than Reason. The love of their young, for instance, though sweet to behold, and worthy of imitation, is not in their case dictated by Reason. Next upon the list come children; in them the latent faculty ought to be developed by older and wiser people bringing what Godwin would call "the artillery of Reason" to bear upon the infant mind. Mary Wollstonecraft protests against the arrogance of those philosophers who, while granting their own sex the privilege of an education, wilfully exclude the other half of humanity from the blessings of Reason, which is the only guide to virtue and moral perfection.

When Mary wrote the "*Original Stories*" she was not more than twenty-nine herself, and had known neither the passion of love nor motherhood. Her all-embracing love of humanity made the subject of interest to her, but there is upon the whole too much of Reason and too little of the heart in the little volume. Circumstances over which she had no control were soon to teach her for good and all that the affections will not be suppressed and peremptorily demand their share. When next she touched upon the subject she was a mother and confronted with the task of educating her own child in the long and frequent absences of a faithless and undeserving father. The "*First Lessons for an Infant*" in Volume II of the posthumous edition of her works are the result of the joint teachings of maternal love and bitter experience. Here she is herself, an essentially human, loving woman, overflowing with tenderness and bound up closely with her child not merely by the ties of duty, but by those of an all-absorbing affection. Having thus tried to do justice to the author by accounting for what seems contradictory, we may frankly say that Mrs. Mason is an insufferable pedant. The Mr. Barlow of *Sandford and Merton*, while constantly moralising, — in doing which he draws

far more sweeping conclusions than even Mrs. Mason — and arranging incidents to illustrate and anticipate his moral lessons like the best of stage-managers [1]), at least does not obtrude her own personality. But the impeccable Mrs. Mason in her boundless self-confidence never loses an opportunity to introduce her own personality. Her benevolence is unlimited, and she is utterly incapable of doing wrong. If she inflicts bodily pain, it is that Reason has whispered to her that in doing so she avoids a greater evil. She puts her foot deliberately on a wounded bird's head, "turning her own the other way". She teaches by example rather than precept, and the example somehow seems to be always herself. Never for a moment are the girls allowed a rest from the moral deluge. The first eight chapters of the little book contain the moral food for one single day, carefully divided into a morning, an afternoon and an evening of incessant moralising. Yet she is "naive" enough to imagine that she teaches imperceptibly, by rendering the subject amusing! If Mary Wollstonecraft had possessed the slightest indication of a possible sense of humour, the absurdity of the Mrs. Mason portrait would have struck her. But she had not, and while relating the most ludicrous incidents, she always remains terribly in earnest!

There is something distinctly oppressive, too, about Mrs. Mason's benevolence. She relieves the distress of the poor, but while doing so her coldly critical eye wanders about the humble cottage and makes the poor wretch feel uncomfortably conscious of its generally unfinished appearance. With her, Reason is always enthroned. The passions are not to be mentioned in her presence. And yet, her cupboard, too, has its skeleton. Early attachments, we are informed, have been broken, her own husband has died, followed by her only child, "in whom her husband died again". Her afflictions have taught her to pin her faith on the hope of eternity, in doing which she has unfortunately forgotten to learn the lesson of earthly suffering and to realise her own imperfections. The virtue of modesty, which she recommends to the girls in contrasting the sweet and graceful rose to the bold and flaunting tulip (!) was not among her many accomplishments.

The little book prepares the reader's mind for the "*Vindication of the Rights of Women*," which was soon to follow, in that it contains a

1) The creation of congenial surroundings, and the bringing about of circumstances which involuntarily lead the pupil to draw certain illuminating inferences, is recommended also in *Emile*, where the preceptor relies largely upon them. There seems nothing to be said against them, unless it were that the pupil might sooner or later discover that he was "being sold", which might be attended with awkward consequences!

long plea for the glorious faculty of Reason, leading to virtue. The heart should be carefully regulated by the understanding to prevent its running amuck. All errors are due to a relegation of Reason to an inferior position; a systematical application, however, cannot fail to conduct towards perfection.

One seems too be listening to the sweeping assertions of *Political Justice*, which was to appear a few years later and in which the general philosophical tendencies of the revolutionary movement were gathered up and stated with bold radicalism. The main line of thought which Godwin followed, and the tendency to resort to "first principles" is everywhere manifest. To call girls "rational creatures" for doing what their monitress expects of them is to give them the most unstinted praise. The absolute subjection of the poor children to their governess is the necessary outcome of the infallibility of the latter's superior Reason, which renders implicit obedience the interest of the former. In her discussion of the filial duties in connection with the parental affections in the *Vindication*, Mary Wollstonecraft insists on just such a degree of obedience as is compatible with the child's obvious interest. Nor is the respect due to superior Reason lost sight of when she opines with respect to marriage that, although after one and twenty a parent has no right to withhold his consent on any account, yet the son ought to promise not to marry for two or three years, should the object of his choice not meet with the approbation of his "first friend". Thus the principles of liberty and obedience are made to fit each other.

The infallibility of Reason is enforced by some "glaring" examples, which bring fresh proof of the author's fatal insensibility to the ludicrous and absurd. The story of the girl who, like Caroline, was vain of her good looks, until she had smallpox, when, having to pass many days in a darkened room, she learned to reflect and afterwards took to reading as a means of enlarging the mind, may pass; but the history of Charles Townley is utterly absurd and distinctly inferior to Day's stories, some of which afford pleasant reading and must have amused the boys. Its hero is the "man of feeling" so prominent in in the sentimental school, who allows his conduct to be governed solely by sentiment. Having chosen the wrong guide, he is made miserable for life, and his sorrows culminate when he beholds the daughter of his benefactor, a maniac, "the wreck of a human understanding", merely because he has too long put off assisting her and relieving her distress, as he intended to do.

The principal vices against which the book inveighs and which are for the most part illustrated by means of fitting stories, or warned against by means of toward incidents, are : anger and peevishness, by which Reason is temporarily dethroned (story of Jane Fretful), lying, immoderate indulgence of the appetite, procrastination, pride, arrogance to servants [1]), sensitiveness to pain and an excessive regard for the vanities of dress and for the opinions of the world (story of the schoolmistress). Thus the ideas which found an outlet in the *Vindication* were anticipated, and the little book marks the first step in the transition from pedagogical to social and political authorship.

Next to the careful eradication of vices, the cultivation of virtues is attended to. The children are taught to love all living creatures, the love of animals being characteristic of the new movement as a natural offshoot of the greater but more difficult love of mankind. They are instructed in the practice of charity, economy, self-denial, modesty and simplicity. The last-named virtue constitutes the link between the educational and the social instruction. The stories of "the Welsh Harper" and of "Lady Sly and Mrs. Trueman" are intended to convey the great truth that class-distinctions are not by any means dependent on moral character and that often "the lower is the higher." Nor can Mary Wollstonecraft refrain from making herself the advocate of the greater love towards mankind. The sad fate of Crazy Robin, who languishes in a debtor's prison, after losing his wife and children through death, is described in a little story which has true touches of pathos, and the horrors of the Bastille are incidentally thrown in to heighten the impression produced. In the naval story told by "Honest Jack" — in which, by the way, absurdity reaches its climax when the hero, losing a eye in a storm, thanks God for leaving him the other — we hear that even the French are not so bad as they are often painted, and are capable of mercy, for while Jack was pining away in a French prison, some women brought him broth and wine, and one gave him rags to wrap round his wounded leg. The whole story is rather a poor attempt at a sailor's yarn, in which the author visibly though vainly exerts herself to catch the right tone, with a rather too obtrusive moral background. We feel that Jack is Mrs. Mason's ideal of manhood and the excellent lady

1) The position of servants very naturally called for discussion in the great liberty scheme. The treatment of female servants never failed to interest Mary. Many years later, Godwin treated the subject in an essay.

forgets herself and her constant companion Reason to such an extent that tears of benevolence are seen "stealing down her cheeks"!

The girls' trials come to an end when at last their father writes for them to return to London. They are described as visibly improved, "an air of intelligence" beginning to animate Caroline's fine features. Mrs. Mason accompanies them to London, and their takes her leave of the two girls, probably to inflict her personality on a pair of fresh victims.

In the next few years the problem of the education of children, although remaining a subject of constant speculation, receded before that of the Cause of Woman. But when Mary was herself a happy mother, the old problems presented themselves in a more tangible form. Godwin informs us in the "*Memoirs*" that shortly before her death she projected a work upon the management of the infant years, "which she had carefully considered, and well understood".

It was about the time of the publication of the "*Original Stories*" that Mary made up her mind to definitely adopt writing as a profession. She realised that in doing so she was flying in the face of prejudice. But she had seen enough of the world, and the result of her long and bitter wrestlings with adversity had been a sufficient increase of moral strength to render her independent of the opinion of others. Henceforth it was to be her task to form the opinions of her sex, and in doing so she totally disregarded the opinion of others concerning herself. Her voluntary martyrdom had begun.

At the same time her scope of observation became considerably widened. Mr. Johnson's house was the resort of a great many of the leading philosophical minds of the day, all of whom had strong revolutionary tendencies, and whose works he brought out with an utter contempt of consequences very much to his credit. Nothing could be more natural than that the constant intercourse with people like Thomas Paine, Fuseli the Swiss painter, Mr. Bonnycastle the pedagogue, Dr. Priestley, Dr. Geddes, Dr. George Fordyce, Lavater and Talleyrand (who in those days paid a visit to England) — to whom was added afterwards the enigmatical personality of William Godwin — should tend to inspire her with strong revolutionary ideas. It had the effect of widening her horizon and of causing her to transfer her energies from the work of education to that of social reform. Mr. Johnson's circle consisted almost entirely of men, the only women, besides Mary, being the more easy-going, and less energetic Mrs. Inchbald and the far less gifted Miss Hayes and Mrs. Trimmer. Where

the men had the Rights of Men for their watchword, Mary Wollstonecraft as a natural consequence found her attention directed towards the position of her own sex, a subject which these hot-headed champions were too apt to overlook.

It was in those days (Nov. 1, 1790) that Burke made his violent onslaught upon what he termed the "seditious" theories concerning the rights of man voiced by her dear friend Dr. Price in his epoch-making sermon at the Old Jewry to his congregation of sympathisers with the Revolution. This direct attack had the effect of making Mary Wollstonecraft seize her pen in defence of her old friend and in support of those principles which had slowly and gradually come to mean a great deal to her. Already the correspondence of the Kingsborough period is distinctly suggestive of awakening social interests, stress being laid on the prejudices connected with rank and station. (Letters to Everina, 1787 and 1788, and to Mrs. Bishop, 1787). In Ireland her eyes had been opened to the moral inferiority of men and women of quality and to the distress of those who, like herself, were dependent on them. The picture of eternity receded before that of earthly injustice to be repaired.

At Mr. Johnson's she frequently took part in the discussion of the possibility of reestablishing the governments of Europe on primary principles, and the new ideas sounded in her ears like a new Gospel of Man. The reflections of Jean-Jacques — she must have read and discussed the *Contrat Social* in those days, although there is no correspondence to prove the assumption — couched in prose "made lyrical by faith" could not fail to impress a mind like that of Mary, than whom they never made an easier proselyte. Add to this the direct stimulus of the revolution, and the prospect of immediate application of the new theories which electrified all revolutionary minds, and it will not be difficult to account for her enthusiasm, which placed her among the first to use her pen in defence of the new creed. When she had almost finished her pamphlet and was about to have it printed, she felt less sanguine about her powers of persuasion, but the work as she wrote it bears the unmistakable evidence of having been struck at a heat, which, together with its obvious sincerity, may account for some of its success.

Dr. Price, in his sermon of 1789, "in commemoration of the Revolution of 1688", had given vent to the feelings of approbation with which he had greeted the outbreak of the French Revolution, and among others expressed the view that the king owes his crown to the

choice of his people and "may be cashiered for misconduct", thus openly declaring himself a follower of the theories of the Social Contract, which are based upon the sovereignty of the people.

Burke in his "*Reflections on the Revolution in France*", takes his stand upon the British constitution — once the object of the admiration of a Montesquieu — to oppose what he regards as nothing less than a direct attempt at sowing the seeds of revolution in Great Britain. His pamphlet called forth no fewer than thirty-eight replies, of which that written by Thomas Paine was the most successful amongst the partisans of the new movement in consequence of its radical tendencies. Mary Wollstonecraft was in the van of the revolutionary army, and shared with Dr. Priestley the honour of being the first to enter the field. To account for her indignation it should be remembered that Burke had until then been regarded as one of the principal Whig advocates of reform, in connection with his attitude towards the American problem. No one had anticipated this sudden change of tactics, so welcome, though unlooked-for, to King George and to Pitt, and it fairly maddened the champions of reform.

Buckle, in his "*History of Civilisation in England*", deeply regrets Burke's conduct, which he calls the consequence of an unfortunate hallucination, due to his feelings having temporarily got the better of his Reason. The vehemence of the controversy in question between opponents who were equally sincere and convinced of the soundness of their views, is due to an essential difference in standpoint, leading to opinions which in either case, though containing an element of truth, must be termed one-sided. The thoroughly practical Burke, whose political ideas were the fruit of an experience of nearly half a century, placed himself upon the purely empirical standpoint, resting his arguments upon a basis of sound historical experience, and asserting that the legislator's first aim should be expediency, taught by experience, and not abstract, speculative truth. He points to the difference between political and social principles, which are the outcome of reason ; and political practice, which is the product of human nature, and of which reason is but a part. The reformers of the opposing camp took their stand upon a basis of abstract, geometrical reasoning, and persistently refused to consider the argument of expediency. They only regarded the theoretical aspect of the social problem. Both parties recognised the doctrines of human rights and of the popular sovereignty, which were of British growth, having been put forward long before Rousseau by John Locke ; but they

differ in their application of them. With Burke, rights are of an hereditary nature. To him, the constitution is the embodiment both of the rights of the free British citizen, and of the duties of the British subject, an inheritance they derived from their ancestors of 1688, together with the duty of keeping the legacy intact in its general tendencies. It was Burke's firm conviction that a statesman should steer clear of philosophical princiciples, which an absolute want of adaptability to the exigencies of a special case renders unfit for practice.

It must be granted that this line of argument in Burke's case led to a fatal blindness to obvious injustice and to a curious inability to appreciate what was good, noble and disinterested in the leaders of the revolutionary movement. Mary Wollstonecraft and her friends failed to see that reforms which are to affect the roots of existing conditions — however desirable and even necessary — must of necessity be slow and gradual, lest our gain should prove but a poor substitute for our certain loss. There are none more dangerous to society than the abstract idealist, whose very inexperience confirms him in the belief that he is in possession of absolute Truth, for which he is willing to lay down his own life, and, *en passant*, the lives of others. Of such a nature was the "amiable defect" — to use her own terminology — developed in Mary Wollstonecraft's nature by too impulsive a zeal in the cause of mankind.

She felt intensely on the subject. The furious onslaught which she makes upon Burke in the *Rights of Man* — without that respect for grey hairs which she would have Burke observe in his dealings with Dr. Price — was prompted by a far deeper feeling for mankind than Burke was capable of. The two vulnerable points in Burke's pamphlet were his unreasonable vehemence and the personal character of his attacks on the one hand, and his want of real sympathy with the "swinish multitude" on the other. The submerged portions of humanity have little to hope for in a statesman who coolly advises them "by labour to obtain what by labour can be obtained and to be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice". The hopeless conservatism of this view aroused the indignation of Mary Wollstonecraft. "It is possible," she exclaims, "to render the poor happier in this world without depriving them of the consolation which you gratuitously grant them in the next!"

Nor has Mr. Burke's "immaculate constitution" her undivided sympathy. She agrees with Rousseau that property, while one of the pillars of the monarchical system, is a deadly enemy to that equality

of men before the law without which there can be no real liberty. The preservation of the intact family-estate for the purpose of perpetuating a time-honoured name and tradition, much as it appeals to Burke, was a phrase the force of which did not strike Mary Wollstonecraft, whose indifference to opinion we have already referred to. It would be far better for society if each large estate were divided into a number of small farms, so that each might have a competent portion and all amassing of property cease.

In the same passage she boldly asserts the rights of man, as laid down by Rousseau in his famous Social Compact, which give him a title to as much liberty, both civil and religious, as is compatible with the rights of every other individual. As it is, the first rule of the doctrine of equality, which says that all men are equal before the law, is utterly disregarded, for does not the law shield the rich and oppress the poor? Property in England is a great deal more secure than liberty.

The views expressed in the above passage to a great extent anticipate those of Godwin's "*Caleb Williams*", published in 1794, which, according to the author's preface, comprehended "a general view of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man", and in which a social system was denounced which enabled the rich man to use the power of a law which seemed to regard only the interests of one single class of society for the most nefarious purposes [1]). A parallel to this sociological novel is afforded by Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished "*Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*", to which, if we replace the last word by "woman", the sentence just quoted applies literally.

It is but fair to state that Mary Wollstonecraft did not persist in her extreme views as to the necessity of a sudden and radical change which at one time made her overlook the principle of slow evolution. She was willing to recognise this principle in her "*Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*", of which the first and only volume was written some three years later. At Paris, before her intimacy with Imlay and the birth of her daughter Fanny brought about a temporary relaxation in her social zeal, her time was spent in watching the development of events with eager and sympathetic interest. Her optimistic faith in the perfectibility

1) Mr. Falkland, the "high-spirited and highly cultured" gentleman of the drama's personae, makes all the advantages of his superior rank to crush his enemy Caleb and finds the law upon his side.

of mankind helped her — as it did Wordsworth — to look beyond the horrors and bloodshed by which her heart was moved to intense pity and indignation. She was convinced that out of the chaotic mass "a fairer government was rising than ever shed the sweets of social life on the world." But, she adds, "things must have time to find their level."

The "*Vindication of the Rights of Man*" — although quite overshadowed by Paine's pamphlet — met with so much success that very soon after its publication a second edition was called for. There is no doubt that this circumstance gave Mary a great deal of encouragement. It became an incentive to further efforts on a larger scale in the direction in which she now realised lay the mission of her life. In spite of her theories she was sufficiently sensitive to praise to feel gratified by it and to derive from it the moral courage necessary to defy public opinion and constitute herself the champion of the Cause of Woman.

We have seen that the Cause of Woman had met with very little regard in England in the course of the century, except where moral improvement was concerned. In France, however, the progress to be recorded was considerable. It will be remembered that Fénelon had been the first to insist on an education which might teach girls the pursuit of some useful ideal instead of leaving them to pass their time in a degrading search for pleasure. There is in Fénélon a distinct foreshadowing of the tendencies of educational reform in later years. With Mary Wollstonecraft also, the chief aim of education is not to prepare the individual for social intercourse, but to accustom the mind to listen to the dictates of Reason. Fénelon has a more negative way of putting the question. He believes in filling the mind with useful ideas as a means of preventing moral degradation.

In the course of the following century, the philosophers of the Encyclopédie introduced their theories of rationalism. Helvétius (in his *Traité de l'Homme*, 1774) insisted on the necessity of a education in connection with his theory that the human mind, which is sovereign, is the exclusive product of education and experience. He may be called a link in the chain of advocates of the Cause of Woman, although not paying the slightest attention to women in particular; for he indirectly advances their cause a step by defending the view that an education is indispensable to develop the mind and thus attain perfection. He is one of the originators of the theory which says that the mind is in a perfectly neutral state at birth, capable of receiving and guarding any impressions which may be produced by acci-

dental circumstances, which a well-regulated education may to a certain extent make or re-make; the obvious conclusion being that all men are of equal birth. To this scheme Diderot in his "*Réfutation*" opposed his theory of heredity, or innate character. Both Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft were adherents of Helvétius. Viewed in the light of original equality, which supposes equal possibilities in individuals who are only physically different, it will be readily seen what a long vista of improvements may be opened by perfecting the education.

In the catalogue Rousseau must be passed over until Mary herself will introduce him, when he will be fighting on the wrong side, although not so completely as Mary Wollstonecraft would have us believe. Although their respective views on the subject of female education and the consequent position of women in society are almost diametrically opposed, yet there is a great deal of sound reasoning in the remarks of both. However, we find in each the same unfortunate tendency to generalisation and exaggeration.

A discussion of the social position of women without direct reference to education, criticising them as they then were, and pointing out what they might be, may be found in d'Holbach's *Social System* (1774), where an entire chapter is devoted to the subject. Mr. Brailsford [1]) points out the strange incongruity which lies in the fact that an atheist and a confirmed materialist was among the first to recommend the emancipation of women. For a rationalist philosopher, indeed, to arrive at the conclusion that women should be made the social equals of men, would be nothing very remarkable, but where d'Holbach constantly keeps in view the moral side of the problem, he approaches the English moralists rather than the French thinkers of the school of Reason.

The tone of his plea is sincere, and his hints are wise, moderate and worthy of consideration. He complains that the education of the women of his time, instead of developing in them those qualities which are best calculated to bring happiness to men, merely tends to make them inconstant, capricious and irresponsible. They are being tyrannised over in every country; in Europe their position is not more enviable than elsewhere, although a varnish of gallantry seeks to hide the fact. Not woman herself is to blame for this, but rather man, who refuses her the benefit of an education which may render

1) See H. W. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*.

her fit to perform the duties of life. There is nothing more inconsistent than the education of girls, which includes instruction in religious matters, teaching them the hope of eternity in conjunction with all the vanities of life, such as dancing and a too great regard for dress and deportment, which are incompatible with true piety.

D'Holbach was also the first to protest against those marriages in which even mutual esteem is wanting, which is even more important than love, because of its greater permanence. Where conjugal infidelity is encouraged on the stage and in society, married life too often becomes one protracted intrigue, and the domestic duties and the education of the children cease to be regarded. Women of the lower classes are even worse off; prostitution is their only course, and society, while readily forgiving the seducer, leaves the victim to a life of infamy.

The chapter ends with an earnest appeal to women to learn the value of reason and the power of virtue, which alone lead to happiness, and to respect themselves if they wish others to respect them.

The paralelism between the passages referred to above and the main drift of Mary Wollstonecraft's contentions in her "*Vindication of the Rights of Women*" is so particularly striking, that the assumption seems justified that she had read d'Holbach.

The outbreak of the revolution caused the new philosophical principles to be put to the test of practical experiment. In 1791 the National Assembly, realising that an important step towards the realisation of that equality they aimed at was the institution of a national education, called upon Talleyrand to elaborate a project of an educational scheme on rational principles. Talleyrand's report pointed out the desirability of allowing women to share in the universal education and to establish schools to which both sexes were to be admitted. As regards the possibility of their taking part in political discussions, he was of opinion that their domestic duties forbade their entering the arena of politics. The education of children was the principal of these duties, and the report says that "after reaching the age of eight, girls should be restored to their parents to be taught housekeeping at home."

The dissolution of the National Assembly caused Talleyrand's scheme to be consigned to oblivion, and his task was entrusted by the Legislative Assembly to the philosopher Condorcet. This disciple of Turgot, who may be called the French Godwin, sharing the latter's love of the mathematics of philosophy, blessed with the same boundless confidence in the future of humanity, and actuated by the same

unselfish enthusiasm, which he did not, like Godwin, take the trouble to hide under a mask of seeming Stoicism. — read his report in April 1792. It almost coincided with the publication of the *Vindication*, for a letter written by Mrs. Bishop to Evelina Wollstonecraft in July of the same year refers to Mary as the successful author of the *Rights of Women*. Condorcet's views differ from Mary's in that he wishes the instruction which is open to all classes to be regulated in accordance with talent and capacity. An education, therefore, regarding innate talents rather than social distinctions, and by which each man is to be rendered independent of others [1]).

Women are to receive the same instruction as men. It is not astonishing that the theorist Condorcet should be inclined to go beyond what the practical Talleyrand considered feasible and to forget the undeniable difference in character and capacities existing between the sexes. In this, Mary Wollstonecraft felt like Condorcet. Both make the mistake, when anxious to assert the intellectual equality of women and to have them recognised as "partakers of Reason", of trying to strengthen their plea by pointing to one or two exceptional women to prove what woman is capable of. The grounds on which Condorcet — continuing the line of thought of his French predecessors — demands instruction for women are the same as those of Mary. Women are the natural educators of the young, they should guard their husbands' affections by making themselves agreeable companions, capable of taking an interest in their daily occupations. But it is the last argument that clinches matters: the two sexes have equal *rights* to be instructed.

It is Condorcet's ideal — as it had been that of Bernardin de St. Pierre — to give the children of the two sexes a joint education, which may prepare them for the social state, and which he feels confident will remove the atmosphere of unhealthy mystery which an artificial separation is apt to produce. Mary heartily concurs with this view. "I should not," she says, "fear any other consequence than that some early attachment might take place, which, whilst it had the best effect on the moral character of the young people, might not perfectly agree with the views of the parents."

I have tried to point out that, although the acquaintance of Mary Wollstonecraft with the works of the French educationalists (Rousseau,

1) This rule, which also applies to property, and may be traced to the *Contrat Social*, strikes the keynote of what was the common view of the social reformers. Mary's scheme of enfranchisement advocates the admission of women to the different professions to ensure their social independence.

of course, excepted) is doubtful, yet there is the closest resemblance in the spirit which animates them. The English writers on the subject, as we have seen, were upon the whole much less enlightened. Their names are repeatedly mentioned in the *Vindication*, and their methods criticised. The principles underlying the theory of the Rights of Man are adopted with perfect logic as a basis on which to consider the position of the female half of society. "If the abstract rights of man will bear discussion and explanation", says the dedication to Talleyrand, in whom she trusted to find a sympathiser, "those of woman, by a parity of reasoning, will not shrink from the same test."

Mary's methods of investigation are borrowed from Rousseau. In his scheme for the improvement of social conditions, the latter had insisted on the necessity of reverting to the original principles which underlie the social structure, and out of the misunderstanding and consequent misapplication of which the great hindrances to human progress, prejudice and prescription arose. A too close regard to expediency — continually contrasted with simple principles — seems to her the cause of the introduction of measures "rotten at the core", from which flow the misery and disorder which pervade society. While adopting Rousseau's general lines of thought, however, she cannot bring herself to share his raptures about the state of nature, which in its essence is nothing but a denial of the possibility of a well-organised society. The optimism with which he regards the individual does not extend to society, in respect to which he is far too pessimistic to suit Mary's unshakable confidence in human perfectibility. Where Rousseau asserts that "l'homme est né bon", and holds the social state responsible for the introduction of evil, Mary Wollstonecraft feels in the presence of evil the will of the Almighty that we should make use of the gift of Reason as a means of conquering evil and attaining perfection. To return to Nature, therefore, would mean evading the chief task which God meant to impose upon his favourite creature, that of cultivating virtue in the social state which He ordained.

Here again, as in Helvétius, d'Holbach and so many others, Reason is to be the governing power. In Reason lies Man's pre-eminence over the brute creation, and out of the struggle between Reason and the passions arise virtue and knowledge, by which man is conducted towards happiness. Mary Wollstonecraft, in bringing her reason to bear upon the existing social conditions, had become deeply conscious of the degrading position of her sex, and, having herself risen above her

troubles, makes a fervent appeal to rational men to give them a chance of becoming more respectable. Her plea, while in the first place for her sex, embraces all humanity, for unless woman be prepared by education to become the companion of man rather than his mistress, she will hamper the progress of knowledge and virtue.

There seems, indeed, a great deal of absurdity in a social scheme which in vindicating the rights of the male portion of humanity, in claiming for them equality, liberty and the blessings of education, could leave the other half of mankind out of consideration. Was liberty to be the portion of men only; and was woman to continue in her state of bondage? Were all men to be partakers of Reason, guided by her only, whilst women had the use of that faculty denied them? In a social state where such partiality could prevail, man was himself responsible for the utter depravity of women. The worst despotism is not that of kings, but that of man, and woman is the trampled-upon victim.

We are thus led to a natural division of the subject into an examination of the position of woman such as it is, and an investigation of what it ought to be and might be. There is one circumstance which distinguishes Mary Wollstonecraft from other champions of the new social creed. In their eagerness to champion oppressed humanity against all forms of tyranny and oppression, Thomas Paine and his followers had been too much inclined to forget that "every right necessarily includes a duty." It is very much to Mary's credit that she emphatically pointed out that "they forfeit the right who do not fulfil the duty." In her claims for equality with men, far from being prompted by sordid motives of envy, or by a desire to obtain power or influence for her sex, she aims at enabling women to discharge the duties of womanhood, among which that of educating their own children occupies the first place. She was always ready herself to take more than her share of those duties, and no one at present doubts her sincerity when saying that she pleads for her sex rather than for herself.

In considering the actual position of women in society she concludes that the trouble arises from two widely different sources. Women have either too much attention paid them, or they have no attention whatever paid them, and the result is equally disastrous, although in a different way. She had had personal experience of the defencelessness and helplessness of a young woman whom fate had cast out upon the cruel world without the means of fighting adverse circumstances,

when financial embarrassments forced her to accept a situation as governess in Lord Kingsborough's home. It had stung her to the quick to realise the contempt in which she was held by those whom she justly considered her intellectual inferiors, merely because no government had ever taken the trouble to provide for women without a natural protector, and the narrow views of society were that any woman who, compelled by circumstances, tried to support herself in an honest profession, degraded herself. That her only alternative was to throw herself upon the protection of some lord of creation and prostitute herself, did not seem to occur to these judges of morality. The only compassion excited by the helplessness of females was the consequence of personal attractions, making pity "the harbinger of lust."

It is the duty of a benevolent government to add to the respectability of women by enabling them to earn their own bread, and to save them from inevitable prostitution, or from the degradation of marrying for support. Let the professions be thrown open to them, let women study to become physicians and nurses. Let there be midwives rather than "accoucheurs", let them study history and politics, all of which will keep them far better employed than the perusal of romances or "chronicling small beer". Women are capable of taking a share in the dealings of trade, of regulating a farm, or of managing a shop. The only employments which have hitherto been open to them are of a menial kind. Thus the position of a governess, who must be a gentlewoman to be equal to her important task of education, is held in less repute than that of a tutor, who is himself treated as a dependant. This prejudice entirely destroys the aim of tutorship in rendering him contemptible to his pupils.

How the personal note appears in the above remarks, the demands of which will certainly not strike the modern reader as exorbitant. However, seen in the light of the prejudices prevailing in Mary's days, they make her stand out very clearly from the common herd of those who were willing slaves to man. She seconds Condorcet in hinting at the remote possibility of having female representatives in Parliament. It may here be argued in favour of her modest proposal — which she fears may excite laughter — that the introduction of women into the Parliament of those days could not very well have made matters worse than they were. The mock representation of the "rotten boroughs" was indeed as she calls it "a handle for despotism"

of the worst description, and on this subject at least a large portion of the nation held coinciding views.

The position of women of the upper classes, who have every attention paid them and pass their lives in search of amusement, although it seems better, is in reality even worse. In connection with his views on this subject Mary is reluctantly obliged to recognise in Rousseau — whose inconsistency is among his chief characteristics — a champion of despotism. Making allowance for a few deviations in details of education, it may be said that here Rousseau's views reflect the general opinion of his time. His educational scheme, which upon the whole had Mary's sympathy, and from which she borrowed largely in her purely educational works, only regards Emile, the boy. The girl, Sophie, only interests him as being essential to the happiness of the male. The theory that the education of women should be "relative to men", as Rousseau puts it, places him in direct opposition to Mary Wollstonecraft, as it implies a necessary inferiority on the part of women. His maxims supply her with a target against which to direct the shafts of her disapprobation and indignation. In his "*Lettre à d'Alembert*" he had made a violent onslaught on women and the passion they inspire. It does not leave them a shred of reputation : modesty, purity and decency are said to have completely forsaken them. The hysterical violence of his sallies was probably due to his hatred of the Encyclopedians, those "philosophers of a day" whose rationalism opposed the utter subjection of women to man's desires. I have already pointed out that it was from the French school of rationalism that the first suggestions of emancipation came, and the above-mentioned epistle marks the beginning of hostilities between the rationalist and the emotional school.

Mary Wollstonecraft did not find it difficult to agree with Rousseau that many women had sunk to a state of deep degradation, but, she asked : "A qui la faute ?" It was man who brought her there, and she expected man to lift her on to a more exalted plane.

The Julie of Rousseau's "*Nouvelle Héloise*" impresses us as another inconsistency. She displays, it is true, the characteristic submissiveness to a characteristically masterful parent, and the usual notions of virtue consisting chiefly in the preservation of reputation which Mary attacks so vigorously in the *Rights of Women*, but Julie has far more individuality than the average young woman of the period. She rather leads her lover than he her. The *Nouvelle Héloise*, however, displays Rousseau's sentimental vein, and is therefore more directly

irrational than anything else he wrote. The Sophie of *Emile* is partly the creation of his intellect, the Julie of the *Nouvelle Héloise* almost exclusively that of his sentiment.

In the fifth book of *Emile*, therefore, sentimentality only plays an occasional part. Rousseau's intellect assigns to woman the place which she ought to fill in society. A writer on female education, says Lord John Morley, may consider woman as destined to be a wife, or a mother, or a human being; as the companion of man, as the rearer of the young, or as an independent personality, endowed with talents and possibilities in less or greater number, and capable as in the case of men of being trained to the best or the worst use, or left to rust unused [1]). Rousseau insists upon the first, makes little of the second, and utterly ignores the third. Emile is brought up to be above all a man; Sophie, however, is given no chance of attaining the necessary qualifications for womanhood and motherhood and is merely educated to be an obedient and submissive companion to her husband. Her opinions are modelled upon Emile's, and in no matter of importance, not even in religion, is she allowed to choose for herself. The last is an emphatic denial of the faculty of Reason in women. That a woman of this stamp, accustomed to mental and moral dependence, is all unfit to educate her own children, is self-evident, nor did Rousseau destine her for this task. As soon as the child has been weaned, the mother passes out of the educational scheme, her place and that of the father being taken by the instructor.

Mary Wollstonecraft regards women in the first place as human beings and asserts their right to be educated. They are in possession of the faculty of Reason, which in them is as capable of being perfected as in their lord and master, man. Their conduct and manners, however, show that their minds are in no healthy state. Having been taught that their chief aim in life is to make a wealthy marriage, they sacrifice everything to beauty and attractiveness of appearance. Instead of cherishing nobler ambitions, they are satisfied to remain in that state of perpetual childhood in which the tyranny of man has purposely kept them. The relative education has made them utterly dependent on masculine opinion. Rousseau, who calls opinion the tomb of virtue in men, recommends it to women as its "high throne", thus introducing a sexual code of morality. They know that the flattering sense of physical superiority makes man prefer them feeble and clinging

1) See Morley's *Rousseau*.

for protection, and accordingly they cultivate physical weakness and dependence. A puny appetite is considered by them "the height of human perfection". Why did not Rousseau extend his excellent advice regarding outdoor sports and games to girls? They would not care for dolls if their involuntary confinement within doors did not incapacitate them from healthier pursuits. Thus the physical inferiority of women is partly of man's own creation, and might be to a large extent remedied.

Once the right of being educated has been granted to women, they must of necessity develop into suitable companions to their husbands and affectionate parents to their children. To assert that woman's only duty consists in catering for the happiness of her lord and master is taking a sordid view of her possibilities. Granting that woman has a soul, and that the promise of immortality applies also to her, it follows naturally that the cultivation of that soul is her chief business in life. The prevailing notion of a sexual character, therefore, is subversive of all morality. Soldiers, who like women are sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles, show the same deplorable lack of common sense.

Scattered through the book are a number of rather desultory remarks from which may be gathered the author's notions regarding the baleful influence of slavery upon the moral aspirations of her sex. Nearly all contemporary authors agreed that woman's chief aim ought to be "to please". Among their number were Mrs. Barbauld, Mrs. Piozzi, Mme de Genlis and Mme de Staël. From the first the notion was inculcated that the chief object is to make an advantageous match, "it is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments, meanwhile strength of mind and body are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves — the only way women can rise in the world — by marriage."

The cardinal virtues of the sex are therefore those qualities which are best calculated to make them acceptable to men, as gentleness, sweetness of temper, docility and a "spaniel-like" affection. Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of women, forgetting that they are the natural outcome of an ignorance which is very far removed from innocence.

The education of women, such as it is, consists only in some kind of preparation for social life, instead of being considered the first step to form a rational being, advancing by gradual steps towards per-

fection. Thus a woman is methodically prepared for the bondage that awaits her, and never gets an opportunity of asserting her better possibilities. A sexual character is established by artificial means, and in this circumstance Mary sees the chief cause of woman's moral decay, for which she herself is only partly responsible.

All her life she remains powerless to get away from the shackles of first impressions. Her conduct is regulated by absurd notions of a specially feminine virtue, chastity, modesty and propriety. Instead of realising that virtue — which surely ought to be the same for women as for men — is nothing but love of truth and fortitude, she confounds with it reputation. Respect for the opinion of the world is considered one of her chief duties, for does not Rousseau himself declare that reputation is no less indispensable than chastity?

For true modesty — which is only that purity of thought which is characteristic of cultivated minds — she substitutes the coquettish affectations which are to draw the lover on while seemingly rejecting him. The insincerity of these principles of daily conduct tend to develop in the female mind that cunning which Rousseau calls natural and accordingly recommends! For a woman to show her actual feelings is to be guilty of the most flagrant breach of modesty.

Where writers have granted to man the monopoly of reason, they have given to woman as a substitute that which is delicately termed "sensibility", but is in reality nothing but a morbid sort of sensuality, the consequence of devouring novels which have the effect of inflaming the senses, and the only antidote to which is healthy exercise.

Mary Wollstonecraft, like the Bluestocking moralists, regarded the quality of sensibility with favour only when regulated by Reason. In her enjoyment of the beauty of natural scenery, according to her own analysis, it is her very reason which "obliged her to permit her feelings to be her criterion." (Letters from Sweden). But it was one of her chief contentions that far too much stress was laid on the cultivation of that kind of sensibility in women which in its very exaggeratedness leads to the worst excesses of sentimentalism. The eighteenth century interpretation of the term "sensibility" with its concomitant absurdities awakened in her feelings of intense disgust. All Rousseau's errors in her opinion arose from its source. To indulge his feelings, and not to imbibe moral strength at the fountain of Nature, or to satisfy a thirst for scientific investigation, he sought for solitude when meditating the rapturous but dangerous love-scenes of the *Nouvelle Héloise*. No doubt these scenes were in her mind when she wrote: "Love

such as the glowing pen of genius has traced, exists not, or only resides in those exalted, fervid imaginations that have sketched such dangerous pictures." She only sees in them "sheer sensuality under a sentimental veil." The sentimentalists who, like Richardson and Rousseau, laid bare the play of the human passions to a reading public consisting almost entirely of women, whose minds were not sufficiently occupied to keep their imagination within bounds. "set fire to a house for the sake of making the pumps play."

Morbid sensibility, in its exaggerated tenderness over insignificant trifles and corresponding indifference to real social evils, excludes from the mind all sense of moral duty.

Two writers of Mary Wollstonecraft's time had shown a more than usual narrowness of views. They were the Rev. Dr. James Fordyce, author of a number of sermons addressed to women, and Dr. Gregory, who had written a "*Legacy to his Daughters.*" The former proceeded from the propositions which had formed the basis of Rousseau's argument. He is so thoroughly convinced of the all-round superiority of man, that he assumes the natural folly of woman to be the cause of all matrimonial differences. He feels sure that women who behave to their husbands with "respectful observance", studying their humours and overlooking their mistakes, submitting to their opinion, passing by little instances of unevenness, caprice or fashion, and relieving their anxieties will find their homes "the abode of domestic bliss."

Fordyce held the principal charm of women to be a sickly sort of delicacy which, as it flatters the vanity of the male, is not wholly without effect even in our days, in spite of all Mrs. Fawcett may say to the contrary. Men of sensibility, he says, "desire in every woman soft features and a flowing voice, a form not robust, and demeanour delicate and gentle." This hint could only have the effect of making women more insipid than even Rousseau's Sophie, who at least after her marriage shared her husband's outdoor exercise. But the worst part of Fordyce's argument is that passage in which he advises young women to remember that the devout attitude of pious recollection (in prayer) is most likely to conquer a man's heart. When a clergyman thus by well-meant advice perverts his flock, what are we to expect from the grosser bulk of mankind!

As Mary Wollstonecraft justly points out, there is about these sermons, for all their sentimental posing and bombastic phrasing, a certain sneaking voluptuousness which would strike a modern woman

as most insulting; a confident tone of proprietorship which could not fail to stimulate any woman of independent temper into revolt. Mrs. Rauschenbusch points out out that Dr. Fordyce was acting in accordance with the tendencies of the Church in advocating that meekness and bearing of injuries without retaliation which are taught by the Gospel.

What particularly galled Mary was the hypocritical prostration of men before woman's charms, that mock politeness which seemed to her the most cruel proof of the degradation of her sex. The description of women by Fordyce as "smiling, fair innocents", and the frequent use of terms like "fair defects", "amiable weakness", etc. where women were concerned, sounded to her as an insult.

In Gregory's "*Legacy to his Daughters*" the case was slightly different. The author was an affectionate father, whose anxiety to shield his motherless girls induced him to become an author. That an honest, well-intentioned man like he should be capable of writing such trash makes us realise the hopelessness of Mary's task. He openly recommends dissimulation. For a woman to show what she feels must be termed indelicate. A girl should be careful to hide her gaiety of heart, "lest the men who beheld her might either suppose that she was not entirely dependent on their protection for her safety, or else entertain dark suspicions as to her modesty." In the lives of the poor Gregory girls Mrs. Grundy was omnipotent!

Unreserved praise, on the contrary, is bestowed upon Mrs. Catherine Macaulay's "*Letters on Education with Observations on Religion and Metaphysical Subjects*", which had appeared in 1790, shortly before their author's death. Mrs. Macaulay had been among the opponents of Burke in a vindication of a French government which owed its authority to the will of a majority; and also in matters educational her views coincided with those of Mary Wollstonecraft. She believed in co-education up to a certain age, which has the obvious advantage of making the daily intercourse between people of different sexes less strained and more natural not only in early youth, but also later in life, when the relations between the sexes ought to be based upon mutual appreciation and esteem. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, she protested against what she called "the absurd notion of a sexual excellence", which not only excluded the female sex from every political right, but left them hardly a civil right to save them from the grossest injuries. It was an unlucky circumstance indeed that the only woman who might have granted Mary the full support of her reputation as the

author of a very successful work on the "*History of England from the Accession of James the First to that of the Brunswick Line*" should have been removed by death at a time when that support might have been of so much value to one who felt forsaken by the majority of her own sex. [1])

Mary Wollstonecraft pleads the necessity of giving woman an education like that which is granted to man, that she may learn to take Reason for her guide. Only then will she be able to perform the specific duties of her sex. But there is a weightier argument for the cultivation of Reason in women. Their deplorable deficiency in this quality has so far made them consider only earthly interests and disqualified them from looking beyond the affairs of this world to the promise of that eternity for which only the soul can fit them. It is in pointing out the evil consequences to the soul of a life devoted to pleasure that Mary's pleadings attain their greatest depth of pathos and intensity. The profound piety of her character makes her protest against this sordid view of life.

"Surely" she exclaims, "she has not an immortal soul who can loiter life away merely employed to adorn her person that she may amuse the languid hours and soften the cares of a fellow-creature who is willing to be enlivened by her smiles and tricks when the serious business of life is over."

Once a woman has attained her aim of a profitable marriage, the circumstances of which almost exclude the possibility of love, she turns all her "natural" cunning to account to establish a sort of mock tyranny over her master. She lives in the enjoyment of her present influence, forgetting that adoration will cease with the loss of her charms, and that woman is "quickly scorned when not adored". In later years there will be no sound basis of friendship arising from equality of tastes to take its place, no reflection to be substituted for sensation, and their earthly punishment consists in a miserable old age. Even when married to a sensible husband, who thinks for her, what will be the fate of a woman who is left a widow with a large family? "Unable to educate her sons, or to impress them with respect, she pines under the anguish of unavailing impotent regret." The passage in which she pictures her ideal of rational womanhood, who, far from being rendered helpless by her husband's death, rises to the occasion and devotes herself with a strong heart to the discharge of

1) See Lilly Bascho, *English Schriftstellerinnen in ihre Beziehungen zur französischen Revolution*. (Angers 1911).

her maternal duties, finally reaping the reward of her care when she sees her children attain a strength of character enabling them to endure adversity, is a piece of true eloquence. "The task of life fulfilled, she calmly waits for the sleep of death, and rising from the grave, may say: "Behold, thou gavest me a talent, and here are five talents". [1])

There never was a more fervent champion of marriage and domesticity than Mary. The sanctity of matrimony needed no enforcement by means of a wedding ceremony, but consisted in the mutual affection and esteem which was felt. Hence her violent criticism of loveless marriages contracted from mercenary motives and her severe condemnation of the harshness with which society treated poor ruined girls.

The twelfth chapter of the *Rights of Women* contains a plea for national education. Mary is here seen treading in the steps of Talleyrand, and forsaking her old masters Locke and Rousseau. They both advocate a private education. Locke wants to educate the "gentleman", making his scheme practicable in isolated applications, but disregarding the bulk of the nation.

Rousseau, who did regard the mass of the people in matters of political speculation, entirely loses sight of the public interest in favour of the private in his educational scheme, thus reducing it to mere abstract speculation, incapable of extensive realisation. But Mary Wollstonecraft adopts the more practical view of the active socialist. The children of the nation are to be educated without the slightest reference to class distinction, and they ought to be brought up together. The exclusive teaching of a child by a tutor will make him acquire a sort of premature manhood, and will not tend to make him a good citizen. He is to be a member of society, and it will not do to regard him as a unit, complete in himself. The same view limits the freedom of the individual to what is compatible with the rights of others. To ignore the duties of the individual towards society would be to build the entire structure of education upon an unsound basis.

This plea for co-education will be seen to be a recantation from former opinions expressed in the "*Original Stories*". The latter had their rise chiefly in the experience gained of boarding-schools during her stay at Eton with the Priors. They seemed to her absolute hotbeds

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1) Curiously enough, Hannah More, — who refers to the education of the children as "the great object to which those who are, or may be mothers, are especially called" — unwittingly copies Mary Wollstonecraft where she says: "In the great day of general account, may every Christian mother be enabled, through Divine grace, to say, with humble confidence, to her Maker and Redeemer, Behold the children whom thou hast given me!"

of vice and folly, where an utter want of modesty introduced the most repulsive habits. The younger boys delighted in mischief, the older in every form of vice. The colleges were full of the relics of popery, the 'mouth-service', which makes all religion but a cold parade of show, and the educators themselves were very poor champions of true religion. What Mary saw at Eton confirmed her in the belief that dayschools were to be preferred, as the only way of combining the advantages of private and public education.

That important part of education which aims at awakening the affections can only be given in the home of loving parents, and only that man can be a good citizen who has first learned to be a good son and brother. A country day-school, affording the best opportunities for unstinted physical exercise, might be expected to be productive of the greatest benefit to young pupils. The division of the educational task between school and home will moreover leave the children the necessary amount of freedom which is denied them when living the cramped lives of boarding-schools.

To make women the companions of men, and to remove the unhealthy atmosphere of an artificial separation of the sexes which produces indelicacy in both, she thinks it necessary that boys and girls should be brought up together. All children should be dressed regardless of class and submitted to the same rules of discipline. They should not be made to remain in the schoolroom for longer than an hour, and be taken out into the schoolyard, or better still, for walks. A good deal of outdoor instruction of the kind Rousseau described might be given by means of spectacular illustration.

At the age of nine comes the first great change in the daily routine. The two sexes will still be together in the morning, engaged in common pursuits, but the afternoon will find the girls bent over their needlework, millinery, etc., while the boys' further instruction will depend on their choice of a trade. Special schools ought to be established for those whose superior abilities render them fit to pursue some course of scientific studies.

Being thus together will take the edge off that unnatural restraint which too often marks the relations between children of a different sex. The position of the teachers — not ushers — should be such as to render them entirely independent of their pupils' parents. The usher's ambiguous position of mixed authority and submission frequently rendered him an object of ridicule to the children. Talleyrand, from whom Mary in all probability borrowed this suggestion,

even wanted to make the children independent of their masters in respect of punishment, by having it inflicted only after the offender had been tried and found guilty by his peers.

It will be seen that the "*Vindication of the Rights of Women*" touches upon a great many points which at the present time have become foregone conclusions, but which, nevertheless, were in Mary's days daring speculations, which were received with anything but general approval.

If it should now appear to us that some of her conclusions were rather too sweeping, that the very physical inferiority of woman which she is willing to grant makes it impossible for her to combine in her person the wife, the mother and the social woman, and that a too ardent application of her theories of the social possibilities of her sex is responsible for some abominations of the public hustings, who, banging their fists on the table, "refuse to be the playthings of men any longer" — it should be remembered that she insisted with equal emphasis upon the cultivation of the female qualities, and that it was not granted her to be taught moderation by the repulsive spectacle of female extremism in later times! Moreover, in the introduction to the first edition of the *Vindication*, she expresses her disgust of "masculine women". And yet the type of a "masculine woman" in Mary's days, with her "ardour in hunting, shooting and gaming", was not nearly so objectionable as her modern sister.

It is, indeed, very difficult to find anything to praise in the *Vindication* when viewed as a literary effort. Mary Wollstonecraft herself clearly did not regard it as such. The importance of the object by which she was animated made her disdain to cull her phrases or polish her style, wishing rather to persuade by the force of her arguments than dazzle by the elegance of her language. Unfortunately the former is not inconsiderably weakened by a deplorable tendency to reiteration, and a general desultoriness and lack of system which cannot fail to strike the reader. The "flowery diction" which she professed herself anxious to avoid, but did not succeed in completely banishing, is responsible for a great deal of the turgidity and false rhetoric which disfigure certain passages.

Godwin, whose unemotional nature enabled him to judge of his wife's work without prejudice and whose *Memoirs* contain a most sincere and therefore valuable criticism, although admiring the courage of her convictions, the disinterestedness of her motives and the originality of her contentions, finds fault with what he calls "the

stern and rugged nature" of certain passages which will probably impress the modern reader as coarse and indelicate. Her great devotion to the cause may account for the "amazonian" temper which fills some parts of her book, more especially the "animadversions" on the opinions of those of her opponents whose "backs demanded the scourge". Her disapproval of Lord Chesterfield's moral standpoint has already been referred to. Mary Wollstonecraft was not in the habit of mincing matters, and her sincerity and consequent frankness brought her the ill-will of many.

The publication of the *Rights of Women* at once brought Mary into prominence. Unfortunately, the scare of a French invasion and the trial of the reformers were most unfavourable to the spread of any new ideas in England. From her sisters she had little sympathy, and "poor Bess" rather spitefully alluded to information she had received to the effect that "Mrs. Wollstonecraft was grown quite handsome" and intended going to Paris. For this trip to France there were several causes. In the first place she felt intensely interested in the march of events there, which were hastening to a crisis, Louis XVI being a prisoner in the hands of the Convention. The second motive — perhaps the principal — was connected with her friendship for Mr. Fuseli, the celebrated Swiss painter; but whether she hoped to make the trip in company with the Fuselis and her friend Johnson, as Mr. Kegan Paul supposes [1]), or wanted to get away from the influence of the artist, with whom Godwin informs us she was in love, is uncertain. The end was that she went to Paris alone in December 1792, and boarded at the house of Mme Filliettaz, a lady in whose school Eliza and Everina had been teachers, but who was absent from home, so that Mary's French was put to the severe test of conversation with the servants.

She now became a close spectator of the progress of that Revolution which upon the whole had her sympathy. Yet it was with mingled feelings that she saw the chariot pass her house in which the royal prisoner was conveyed to his trial a few days after her arrival. The sight of Louis going to meet death with more dignity than she expected from his character, brought before her mind the picture of his ancestor Louis XIV, entering his capital after a glorious victory, and pity, her ruling passion, interceded for the poor victim who had to pay for the crimes of his forefathers.

1) C. Kegan Paul, Memoir to the "*Letters to Imlay*".

Economy prescribed her removal from the Filliettaz mansion to less pretentious quarters at Neuilly, where she was left a great deal to herself, save for an occasional visit to her English friends in Paris Miss Williams and Mrs. Christie. It was at the latter's house that a meeting took place which decided the next few years of her life.

Her days at Neuilly were thus spent in retirement. She had a devoted old gardener to wait upon her and generally went out for a walk in the evening, the hours of daylight being given up to the composition of a new work, combining history with philosophy and inspired by the stirring events to which she was such a close witness. Although not published until some years after, "*An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution, and the Effect it has produced in Europe*" was written in the first months of 1793 at Neuilly. The Advertisement with which it opens declares the author's intention of extending the work to two or three more volumes, a considerable part of which, it informs us, had already been written ; but Godwin assures us that no part of the proposed continuation was found among her papers after her death. The only existing volume both in style and method shows a very decided advance upon the earlier *Vindication*. Mary's narrative powers were even greater than her capacity for philosophy, and her imagination had been fired by the thrilling accounts she had received from her Parisian friends of the march of events. The greater freedom and fluency of the style, the greater cogency of the reasoning and the dignity of the narratve render the volume very pleasant reading, the more so, as it shows great moderation and impartiality as far as actual facts are concerned. That the delineations of personal character are not always felicitous may be due to the fact that the author obtained all her information from witnesses who were not free from the prejudices which strong party-feelings awaken. On the whole, however, Mary succeeded in placing herself above her subject and in proving that time had taught her to modify her extreme views and made her readier to grant certain concessions. The book is a compromise between her former principles of abstract philosophy and those of gradual evolution. Although unwilling to abandon her original view that "Reason beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can prove the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion", and that the erroneous inferences of sensibility should be carefully guarded against, yet she felt sufficient appreciation for her old enemy Burke's principle of growth to admit that the Revolution was the natural consequence

of intellectual improvement, gradually proceeding to perfection.

Never before had her hopes been so sanguine. It seemed to her that the time was at hand for the final overthrow of the tremendous empire of superstition and hypocrisy. What, in comparison with the great end in view, were the inevitable horrors of the Revolution, produced by desperate and enraged factions? There is not a single page in the history of man but is tarnished by some foul deed or bloody transaction. That the vices of man in a savage state make him appear an angel compared with the refined villain of artificial life finds its cause in those unjust plans of government which exist in every part of the globe. A simpler and more effective political system would be sure to check those evils, and a faithful adherence to the new principles will lead mankind towards happiness.

Her feelings for mankind, however strong, were not powerful enough to interfere with the coolness of her judgment, and the light of her reason which was so soon to be temporarily eclipsed by the conflict of passions a thousand times more powerful because proceeding from within, was never obscured by the contemplation of social evils, which could not disturb her optimistic faith.

The history of the French Revolution is traced down to the king's removal to Paris, where he was sent to stand for trial. It is, upon the whole, a successful attempt at impartial narrative not only of the course of events in Paris, but also of the causes which produced them, the author indulging in a minute survey of the state of French society and politics previous to and during the catastrophe. The severity of the judgment she passes on the king and more especially on Marie Antoinette has been commented upon. Here especially it should be remembered that she had everything from hearsay. What she heard of the character and actions of the queen struck her as characteristic of the type of womanhood she had so violently attacked in the *Rights of Women*. She saw in Marie Antoinette the product of education by a priest, who had instilled into her all those vices which Mary held in abhorrence. She was devoted to a life of pleasure, vain of her good looks, but dead to intelligence and benevolence, using the fascination of her cultivated smiles and artificial weakness to exercise the tyranny of sex over a sensual, besotted husband, whose depravity she completed; an artificial dissembler, regarding only decorum, without any reference to moral character, making free with the nation's money to support a worthless brother, and depraving the morals of those around her; in short, Mary Wollstonecraft regarded her as the

Babylonian scarlet woman, a sort of "painted Jezebel." Her judgment is diametrically opposed to that of Burke, who went into such raptures over the beauty and dignity of the queen, and gave vent to such a burst of indignation at her sad and ignominious fate that Thomas Paine saw fit to remind him that "while pitying the plumage, he was forgetting the dying bird."

The outer revolution which was to assert the rights of the species was followed by an inner revolution in the individual which came to constitute the tragedy of Mary Wollstonecraft's life. The Father of Nature, whom she thanked for having made her so intensely alive to happiness, had also implanted in her breast an overwhelming capacity for sorrow, and after a short taste of the former, the latter became her portion to such an extent that life seemed to her unendurable.

The letter to Mr. Johnson referring to the king's trial was the last news her friends in England received from her for eighteen months. In February 1793 war broke out between England and France and Mary's nationality made it advisable for her to keep close. Among her new acquaintances was an American, Captain Gilbert Imlay, and the tenderness which about this time she began to cherish for him, was no doubt fostered by a sense of loneliness. Moreover, that affection for Mr. Fuseli which she had so resolutely suppressed, — Fuseli was happily married — left her more vulnerable than before to Cupid's arrows, in addition to which Imlay was to her the representative of that nation which embodied her ideals of liberty and virtue. She gave herself up body and soul to the all-devouring passion of love, and Reason, seeing another in full possession of the field, "with a sigh retired."

Mr. Imlay had served as a captain in the revolutionary army during the War of Independence, and derived some slight literary fame from the publication of a short monograph on the state of America, entitled "*Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America.*" He was, therefore, a man of some accomplishments, which makes his subsequent behaviour to Mary all the more unpardonable.

At the time of Mary's first meeting him he appears to have been in business — probably his line was timber — and the dealings of his trade claimed a great deal of his time and nearly all his attention. Circumstances putting marriage out of the question, — a wedding-ceremony would have betrayed that nationality she was so anxious to conceal — she consented to live with him as his wife by virtue of their mutual affections. His correspondence shows that he regarded

her as his lawful wife, and as Mary fully expected the alliance to be of a permanent nature, and believed him capable of that affection which Reason causes to subside into friendship after the first flame of passion is spent, she was acting in full accordance with the views she had repeatedly expressed. [1])

The letters which she wrote him in the first stage of their growing intimacy are full of exquisite tenderness. Her repeated "God bless you", which Sterne says is equal to a kiss, shows the depth of her feelings towards him. Seldom was a purer, more unselfish love wasted upon a more unworthy recipient. Imlay was a "mere man", of a cheerful disposition and to a certain extent good-natured, but easy-going, self-indulgent, inconstant and incapable of appreciating a noble love which in himself could not cherish. He evidently looked upon his relation to Mary as the amusement of a day, — she lavished upon him that which might have made a greater soul happy for life. She tried to draw him up to her level and failed; her efforts to cure him of his sordid love of money which so disgusted her only irritated him, and made him anxious to cast off the bonds of a union of which he soon began to tire. Their agreement had been entered upon in a different spirit, and it was Mary who paid the full penalty of disillusionment. A letter he wrote to Mrs. Bishop in November 1794, when the estrangement had already begun, at a time when Mary was deeply conscious of the fact that he neglected her for business and perhaps worse, in which he states that he is "in but indifferent spirits occasioned by his long absence from Mrs. Imlay and their little girl" shows that he cannot even be acquitted from the charge of absolute hypocrisy.

Such was the individual whom Mary had appointed the sole keeper of her possibilities of happiness. Love had come to her late in life, but when it did, it took the shape of that complete surrender in which consists woman's greatest bliss and which she had never thought possible. It came as a revelation and brought experience in its train. Who shall describe the anguish of her heart when after a short spell of ecstatic bliss, the inevitable truth began to dawn upon her! Mary was not an essentially sensual woman; almost from the first she looked for that sympathy of the mind which was not forthcoming. She found him wanting, and the recognition of this probably irritated him, and ultimately made him transfer his easy-going affections to those who were less exacting. He was far too matter-of-fact to sympa-

1) "We are soon to meet, to try whether we have mind enough to keep our hearts warm". (*Letter to Imlay*, August 1793).

thise with or even understand her moments of tenderness, and too much occupied with his business to be much of a companion to her. In the month of September, after a few months together, he went to Hâvre. Then it was that Mary's troubles began. In her letters she repeatedly protested against his prolonged absences. She grew to hate commerce, which kept him away from her. His promise "to make a power of money to indemnify her for his absence", failed to produce any impression. Perhaps there was already then the vague fear of a possible desertion haunting her. She was in expectations, and the tenderness with which her letters refer to the coming event would stamp a repetition of her hopes and fears as an indelicacy. For the first time in her life, the champion of the rights of women was happy in acknowledging the superiority of a man. "Let me indulge the thought that I have thrown out some tendrils to cling to the elm by which I wish to be supported." Well might she say that this was talking a new language for her ! The feelings, so long pent up and cheated of their birthright by tyrannical Reason, were indeed asserting themselves with a vengeance !

The undefined dread of coming disaster makes her letters more and more insistent. Grief and indignation at Imlay's neglect struggle for the mastery. At last he wrote to ask her to join him at Hâvre. The irritation he had felt against her — which she humbly ascribed to the querulous tone of her correspondence — had worn away and there was a brief renewal of happiness when in the spring of 1794 a little girl was born, to whom the name of Fanny was given in commemoration of the friend of Mary's youth.

In the course of the following August Imlay went to Paris, where Mary joined him in September, at the end of which month he proceeded to London on business. The extensive trade he was carrying on with Sweden and Norway at this time completely engrossed him. Mary's first letters after this fresh separation were cheerful and pleasant, although she was subject to occasional fits of depression. The conviction that Imlay was about to forsake her does not appear to have taken root until the closing month of the year. The days of the Terror were now over, and people once more breathed freely. Mary made an heroic effort to let the future take care of itself and to concentrate her attention upon her little girl, who developed an early fondness for scarlet coats and music, and on one occasion wore the red sash in honour of J. J. Rousseau, her mother confessing that "she had always been half in love with him."

Imlay's letters now became few and far between. His business-schemes were unsuccessful, and Mary took the opportunity to point out to him the absurdity of thus wasting life in preparing to live. The tone of her correspondence betrays a growing indignation at his treatment of her, which appeared in spite of herself and which repeated protestations of unalterable affection could not hide. "I do not consent to your taking any other journey," she writes. "or the little woman and I will be off the Lord knows where." She wants none of his cold kindness and distant civilities, but wishes to have him about her, enjoying life and love. The picture of sweet domesticity, of parents sharing the sacred duty of education, of pleasant evenings of homely tenderness spent at the fireside, recurred to her mind with a sense of aching regret. She would far sooner struggle with poverty than go on living this unnatural life of separation. Too proud to be under pecuniary obligations to a neglectful husband, she began to consider the possibility of having to provide for herself and her child.

When at last he allowed her to join him in England, she no longer cherished false hopes, but begged him to tell her frankly whether he had ceased to care. But Imlay wanted her support for his business-schemes. He asked her to go to Sweden and Norway for him to attend to his interests and Mary consented with a heavy heart, hoping that a complete change of surroundings might afford distraction, if not amusement, for she was feeling utterly worn out and ill.

Imlay kept up the melancholy farce a few months longer. Mary wrote him a series of long epistles from Scandinavia, into which, as a means of keeping her mind concentrated upon other matters, she inserted elaborate descriptions of the voyage, of the countries in which she was travelling, and of their inhabitants.

Of these letters, the descriptive portions of which were published in 1796, Godwin speaks highly. Their perusal caused him to change his opinion of the author of the *Rights of Women*. Their first, and so far only, meeting — in November 1791 — had not prepossessed him in her favour. She seemed to him to monopolize the conversation, and prevented him from listening to Tom Paine, who never was a great talker, and whom she reduced to absolute silence. But he now learned to think highly of her literary talent. The passages dealing with personal affairs had of course been omitted, and afterwards found their way into Godwin's *Posthumous Edition of the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, and also into Mr. Kegan Paul's collection of *Letters to Imlay*. The tone of despair has on the whole given way to one of re-

signed melancholy. In spite of the sadness which prevailed in Mary's heart, the change was doing her good, and her health was improving rapidly. Before her arrival at Tonsberg in Sweden, she had felt very ill, a slow fever preyed on her every night. One day she found "a fine rivulet filtered through the rocks and confined in a basin for the cattle." The water was pure, and she determined to turn her morning-walks towards it and seek for health from the nymph of the fountain. She also wished to bathe, and there being no convenience near, took to rowing as a pleasant and at the same time useful exercise.

While thus the flush of health was returning to her cheeks, she found it easier to arrive at a conclusion. She made up her mind that there should be an end to all uncertainty. Imlay was put before a dilemma. Either they must live together after her return, or part forever. Still he kept flattering her with the hope that he might join her at Hamburg, for a trip to Switzerland, the country of her dreams since the days of Neuilly. But he did not keep his word, and when Mary landed at Dover in October 1795, she realised that all was over and that Imlay had entered into a new connection with an actress.

Then it was that Mary made up her mind to die. The harrowing details of her fruitless attempt at suicide may be found in Godwin's *Memoirs* and also in Mr. Kegan Paul's work. After her rescue she learnt to live for her child's sake, and not to flinch from the sacred duties which tied her to life. Imlay passed out of her sphere, and she parted with him in peace. But the sufferings through which he had made her pass had stamped themselves indelibly upon her heart.

The "*Letters written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*" met with a favourable reception. Being the narrative of foreign travel, they mark a new departure in her literary career. She held with Rousseau that travelling, as the completion of a liberal education, ought to be adopted on rational grounds. [1]) The writing of a journal was to her a means of keeping the mind employed, and preventing it from dwelling overmuch on painful recollections of disappointed hopes. Her works of education and reform had been so full of the militant spirit, and her correspondence with Imlay so replete with the anguish of unrequited love, that she had not yet come to recognise the soothing effect upon the mind of a close communion with Nature. It is in the Scandinavian correspondence that the

1) When Emile's education is almost completed, he is sent abroad for the final touch. In this way he obtains full command of the principal languages of Europe.

Nature-element is first met with. The contemplation of the grand coast-scenery gave her that peace and quiet for which her heart yearned. It did not bring her forgetfulness of present troubles, but it gave her the necessary strength to meet them without flinching. In her little boat, surrounded by the glorious works of Nature, she found herself for the first time capable of grappling with her problem, which the sense of human insignificance reduced to its true proportions. The nature of her worship stamps her as the true spiritual child of Jean-Jacques. The writers of an earlier period had been able to appreciate only what is congenial in nature. The forbidding austerity of the snow-clad mountains of Switzerland had produced no raptures in Goldsmith's breast, and Cowper's English landscape owed its attractiveness to its suggestion of peaceful harmony. Rousseau had been the first to love Nature also in her sterner moods and aspects; like Wordsworth, "the sounding cataract haunted him like a passion", and the *Nouvelle Héloise* contains the faithful record of the impressions produced upon him by the grandeur of the Valais mountains. Some of Mary's nature-descriptions — notably those of the Trollhaettan Falls, and of the rocky Norwegian coast — afford a parallel to these passages. She was deeply impressed by the wonders of Nature she witnessed, and by the exquisite loveliness of the short northern summer. "In the evening the western gales which prevail during the day, die away, the aspen leaves tremble into stillness, and reposing Nature seems to be warmed by the moon, which here assumes a genial aspect; and if a light shower has chanced to fall with the sun, the juniper, the underwood of forest, exhales a wild perfume, mixed with a thousand nameless sweets, that, soothing the heart, leave images in the memory which the imagination will ever hold dear."

There is an anticipation of Wordsworth in the last line of the above passage. Mary recognises in Nature "the nurse of sentiment", producing melancholy as well as rapture, as it touches the different chords of the human soul like the changing wind which agitates the aeolian harp.

Her worship of Nature, like that of Wordsworth, contains an element of profound piety. When she wrote her letters from Sweden, Mary had reached that stage in her religious life which is marked by a complete silence as far as dogma is concerned. Yet this silence should not be misconstrued into indifference. Her feelings on the subject were not of the nature of a systematic creed, and therefore never took an external organisation. They remained perfectly subjective in their

vagueness, like the natural religion of Rousseau with which they have so much in common. Mary did not care to become an apostle of faith, to her religion was rather a matter of the inner life, which wanted no outlet into the world, but remained locked up in itself. She believed that her rational powers enabled her to discover certain portions of Truth, but that the mystery which veiled the presence of God could not be removed by Reason, but remained a matter of the heart. There is no touch of rationalism, or anything but pure sentiment, in the passage in which she describes her return from Fredericshall in a perfect summer night. "A vague pleasurable sentiment absorbed me, as I opened my bosom to the embraces of Nature, and my soul rose to its author, with the chirping of the solitary birds, which began to feel, rather than see, advancing day."

A great deal of attention is paid in the letters to the national character of the inhabitants of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, which she holds to be the result chiefly of the climatic conditions. Never had she seen the blessings of civilisation more clearly demonstrated than by the utter lack of them among the Scandinavians. Especially in Sweden, civilisation was at that time in its earliest infancy, and what struck Mary from the first was the ignorance of the people. What she saw of their manners and customs was not calculated to make her fall in love with Rousseau's golden age of simplicity. They were full of vices, and their very virtues had their origin in considerations of a lower order. They were hospitable, but their hospitality, arising from atotal want of scientific pursuits, was merely the outcome of their inordinate fondness of social pleasures, "in which, the mind not having its proportion of exercise, the bottle must be pushed about."

Being ignorant of the advantages of the cultivation of the mind, they were content to remain as they were : ignorant, sluggish and indifferent to social progress. They moved in a narrow sphere, did not care for politics, had no interest whatever in literature and no topics of conversation, and were strangely incapable of appreciating the charms of Nature. Mary's experience was chiefly gained in the small provincial towns. They necessarily presented to her — so she thought — the worst side of the picture. To her, the ideal condition was "to rub off in a metropolis the rust of thought, and polish the taste which the contemplation of Nature had rendered just." But no place seemed to her so disagreeable and unimproving as a small country-town.

The refined amusements of a cultivated society being thus inaccessible to the Swede, he will choose them of the coarsest kind. Meals

occupy a prominent place in the daily routine, and a good many hours are wasted at table. A "visiting-day" means a severe strain upon the powers of digestion, and to make matters worse, the brandy-bottle, — the bane of the country — passes round freely.

What Mary saw of wedded life in Sweden did not give her a high opinion of Swedish morals. The men were generally inconstant, and also the women lacked chastity — the product of the mind. The statement that in later life "the husband becomes a sot, whilst the wife spends her time in scolding the servants", likewise finds its explanation in the *Rights of Women* as the natural result of vacancy of mind where youthful beauty and animal spirits have gone the way of all flesh !

Neither has the treatment of servants Mary's sympathy. "They are not termed slaves ; yet a man may strike a man with impunity because he pays him wages." But the lot of female servants is immeasurably harder. Their having to eat a different kind of food from their masters strikes Mary as a remnant of barbarism.

The general appearance of the women is not prepossessing. Too much attention to the delights of a well-provided table makes them fat and unwieldy and soon changes the natural pink of their complexions to a sallow hue. They are uncleanly of their persons, and vanity is more inherent in them than taste. Their ignorance is even more profound than that of the males, and Mary once had the compliment paid her that "she asked men's questions."

The peasantry of Sweden impressed her as more really polite and obliging than the better-situated classes, whose cold politeness consisted chiefly in tiresome ceremonies.

In Norway, however, the unmistakable signs of a coming dawn were noticeable. A river forms the boundary between the two countries, and yet, what a difference in the manners of the inhabitants of the two sides ! Instead of the sluggishness and poverty of the Swede, here are industry and consequent prosperity. It is the patient labour of men who are only seeking for a subsistence which affords leisure for the cultivation of the arts and sciences that lift man so far above his first state. The world requires the hand of man to perfect it, and as this task naturally unfolds the faculties he exercises, it is physically impossible that he should remain in Rousseau's golden age of stupidity. And although the cultivation of science in Norway is as yet in its earliest stages — the time for universities having not yet come — yet a bright future is awaiting her.

Norway seemed to Mary Wollstonecraft the country of the greatest individual freedom. The king of Denmark, it is true, was an absolute monarch, but the state of imbecility to which illness had reduced him placed the reins of government into the hands of his son the prince royal and of his wise and moderate minister Count Bernstorff. Under their almost patriarchal authority every man was left to enjoy an almost unlimited amount of freedom. The law was mild, and the lot of those it sentenced to hard labour not unnecessarily hard. She found in Norway no accumulation of property such as existed in Sweden, resulting in the abject poverty of the submerged tenth. Rich merchants were made to divide their personal fortunes among their children ; and the distribution of all landed property into small farms, — one of the ideals hesitatingly put forward by Mary in the *Rights of Women* — produced a degree of equality which was found nowhere else in Europe. The tenants occupied their farms for life, which made them independent. There was every hope that drunkenness, the inherent vice of generations, would before long disappear, giving place to gallantry and refinement of manners ; "but the change will not be suddenly produced."

The Norwegians love their country, but they have not yet arrived at that point where an enlarged understanding extends the love they cherish for the land of their birth to the entire human race. They have not much public spirit. However, the French Revolution meets with a great deal of sympathy among the people of Norway, who follow with the most lively interest the successes of the French arms. "So determined were they," says Mary, "to excuse everything, disgracing the struggle of freedom by admitting the tyrant's plea necessity, that I could hardly persuade them that Robespierre was a monster."

Mary hoped that the French Revolution would have the effect of making politics a subject of discussion among them, "enlarging the heart by opening the understanding," and leading to the cultivation of that public spirit the absence of which she regretted.

Although the women of Norway were not much more cultivated than their Swedish sisters, regarding custom and opinion to such an extent that Mary's educational advice was not listened to lest "the town might talk", and on the plea that "they must do as other people did" — yet they compared favourably with the latter in the matter of personal appearance and cheerfulness of disposition. They had rosy complexions, and were pronouncedly fond of dancing. They were very strict in the performance of their religious duties ; yet showed the

greatest toleration ; nor was the Norwegian Sunday remarkable for that stupid dulness which characterises the English Sabbath, the outcome of that fanatical spirit which Mary feared was gaining ground in England.

The same lack of public spirit which Mary commented upon in her description of the national character of the Norwegians, also struck her when observing the manners and customs of the Danes in their capital. There had been a huge fire, destroying a considerable portion of the town, and held by some to be the work of Pitt. It was the general opinion, that the conflagration might have been smothered in the beginning by pulling down several houses before the flames had reached them, to which, however, the inhabitants would not consent. Mary found among the Danes a great many vices. The men led dissolute lives, and utterly neglected their wives, who were reduced to the state of mere house-slaves. Their only interest was love of gain, which, in rendering them over-cautious, sapped their energy. A visit to a theatre showed Mary the state of the dramatic art in Denmark and the gross taste of the audience, and the fact that well-dressed women took their children to witness the execution of a criminal as a favourite kind of entertainment, filled her with unutterable disgust. "And to think that these are the people," she exclaims, "who found fault with the late Queen Matilda's education of her son!" Matilda, it appears, had carried some of Rousseau's principles into effect, which, however, had found no favour at the court.

The ignorance and coarse brutality which she found among the Danes were instrumental in changing Mary's opinions of the French. The Parisian festivals were rendered more interesting by the sobriety of those who took part in them, a Danish merry-making, however, generally degenerated into a drunken bacchanal. "I should have been less severe," she says, "in the remarks I have made on the vanity and depravity of the French, had I travelled towards the north before I visited France."

The antipathy with which she had always regarded the dealings of business was increased by the experience she gained during her stay in Scandinavia. At Gotheburg and at Hamburg the contrast between opulence and penury which the war had called forth filled her with indignation, and at Laurvig, in Norway, the lawyers proved to be all great chicaners. It seemed to her that traffic was necessarily allied with cunning. The gulf which now yawned between her and Imlay was widened by the circumstance that she was unable to feel anything

but contempt for what he had made his chief object in life. She was willing to admit that England and America to a certain extent owed their liberty to commerce, which created a new species of power to undermine the feudal system. But let them beware of the consequence, the tyranny of wealth is still more galling and debasing than that of rank!

Shortly after the final rupture with Imlay Mary renewed her acquaintance with Godwin in the house of their mutual friend Miss Hayes. She took a fancy to him, and in the following month of April called upon him in Somers Town, having herself taken a lodging in Pentonville. In Godwin's *Memoirs* the description of their friendship, "melting into love" may be found. A temporary separation in July 1796, when Godwin made an excursion into Norfolk, had its effect on the mind of both parties. As Godwin says, it "gave a space for the maturing of inclination," and both realised that each had become indispensable to the other.

They did not at once marry. Godwin, in his *Political Justice*, had declared himself against marriage, which compels both parties to go on cherishing a relation long after both have discovered their fatal mistake. Moreover, marriage is a contract for life, and binding to both parties; and no rational being can undertake to promise that his opinions will undergo no change in the future. Mary's ideas of marriage we have seen to be different, nor did she change her mind under Godwin's influence. But she had been much and rudely spoken of in connection with Imlay, and she could not resolve to do anything that might revive that painful topic, and therefore agreed to keep their relations a secret from the world.

Mary's pregnancy, however, became their motive for complying with a ceremony to which Godwin in a letter to Mr. Wedgwood, refers as follows: "Nothing but a regard for the happiness of the individual, which I had no right to injure, could have induced me to submit to an institution which I wish to see abolished, and which I would recommend to my fellowmen never to practise but with the greatest caution." The marriage took place at Old St. Pancras Church on March 29th, 1797, but was not declared till the beginning of April. Godwin records with some bitterness that certain of his friends, among whom were Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Siddons, from this moment treated him with coldness.

In accordance with Godwin's ideas of cohabitation he engaged an apartment about twenty doors from their house in Somers Town,

where he pursued his literary occupations and sometimes remained for days together. The notes which passed between the two lovers in their five months of married life show that upon the whole they were very happy, although they had one or two slight differences. Their most serious trouble in those days were the constant financial embarrassments. In June Godwin went on a long excursion with his friend Montagu, and the letters of both husband and wife are full of the most affectionate solicitude. The time of Mary's confinement was now rapidly approaching, but her health was quite good, and she concentrated a good deal of energy upon a novel which she had begun in the first period of her intimacy with Godwin. It engrossed her mind for months, and she wrote and rewrote several chapters of it with the most elaborate care. When she died, the work, to which she gave the name of "*Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*", was unfinished, in spite of which circumstance Godwin decided to include the fragment in his edition of her posthumous works.

A long and circumstantial account of Mary's last days is given in Mr. Kegan Paul's "*William Godwin; His Friends and Contemporaries.*" Suffice it to say, that she gave birth to a daughter Mary on the 30th of August, 1797, and in spite of the constant attendance of some of the best doctors in London, died eleven days later.

In the year following her death, Godwin published his *Memoirs*. They are an admirable piece of writing; yet they did not produce the effect he hoped for: that of making the principles and motives by which she was actuated in life better understood and more generally appreciated. The disfavour with which his personality was regarded in many circles on account of his radicalism rendered him all unfit for the task. Fortunately, later generations have done justice to the impartiality of his judgments. We, at least, realise what the unstinted praise of a man of Godwin's sincerity means, although to us her character and actions require no vindication.

Perhaps without being aware of it himself, Godwin paid his deceased wife the greatest compliment in his power when insisting on the astonishing degree of soundness which pervaded her sentiments, enabling her to supplement her husband's deficiencies. Both he and Mary carried farther than to their common extent the characteristics of the sexes to which they belonged. Godwin, while stimulated by the love of intellectual distinction, was painfully aware of his lack of what he calls "an intuitive sense of the pleasures of the imagination." Women, he says, who are more delicate and susceptible of impression

than men, in proportion as they receive a less intellectual education, are more unreservedly under the empire of feeling."

If this estimate of women is correct, it proves the superiority of Mary Wollstonecraft over the other members of her sex. For the fact that her great natural gifts, joined to her boundless energy enabled her to attain an intellectual level far beyond the reach of others, did not in any sense detract from the warmth of her heart and the intensity of her feelings, by which she proved herself above all a tender, loving woman, thoroughly capable of constituting the happiness of a husband who was himself a leader of men.

When two years after Mary's death Godwin published "*St. Leon*," he gave in his idealised description of the married life of St. Leon and Margaret what he felt to be a faithful account of their short spell of matrimonial happiness. Well might he say of his Margaret that the story of her life is the best record of her virtues.

It has been the aim of the present study to prove Mary Wollstonecraft the spiritual child and heir to the French philosophers of her own and of the preceding century — to a Poullain de la Barre, a Fénelon, a Mme de Lambert, a d'Holbach, who ventured to propose a scheme for the improvement of the deplorable conditions of an erring and suffering womanhood. More extreme in her views, and more determined in her claims than her Bluestocking sisters, she stands out the one great apostle of female emancipation among the revolutionary leaders who held out the hope of lasting social improvement to all mankind. That she aimed too high and failed to find that recognition among her contemporaries to which her spirit of ready sacrifice entitled her, lends her a certain tragic dignity which adds materially to the interest felt by posterity in her striking personality.

And yet her work certainly was not done in vain, although it was left to a later generation to build the huge structure of modern feminism on the ruins of a hope which, together with even more comprehensive ideals, had been blasted by the rude winds of Reaction. This structure the present generation beholds with feelings which are not wholly unmixed, for it is as yet full of imperfections, and much remains to be done. But those who feel doubtful of the final issue, may turn to Mary Wollstonecraft, to borrow from her that unshakable faith in evolution and progress which to her became a kind of religion which never forsook her.

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## STELLINGEN

1. There never was a more fervent champion of marriage and domesticity than Mary Wollstonecraft, who twice lived with a man to whom she was not married.

2. The Bluestocking assemblies differed in their essential qualities from the French salons both of the seventeenth and of the eighteenth century.

3. British influence was a potent factor in the intellectual revolt which preceded the French Revolution.

4. Those who, like St. Marc Girardin and Lord John Morley, observe that in the fifth Book of Rousseau's "*Emile*" we are confronted with the oriental conception of women, do its author an injustice.

5. The views expressed in Paine's „*Rights of Man*" regarding the attitude of Burke towards democracy are open to criticism.

6. Mr. R. H. Case's interpretation of the text of Shakespeare's "*The Tragedy of Coriolanus*", Act I, Scene IX, l. 45 :

> When steel grows soft as the parasite's silk,
> Let him be made an overture for the wars !

is quite plausible.

7. The popularity of Tennyson's poetry is largely due to circumstances which are independent of his greater poetic qualities.

8. There is a strong element of romance in Richardson's so-called „realistic" novels.

9. Behoudens het geven van eene beknopte historische inleiding is het niet wenschelijk het onderwijs in de Engelsche letterkunde aan onze middelbare scholen en gymnasia uit te strekken tot die perioden welke vallen vóór Shakespeare.

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